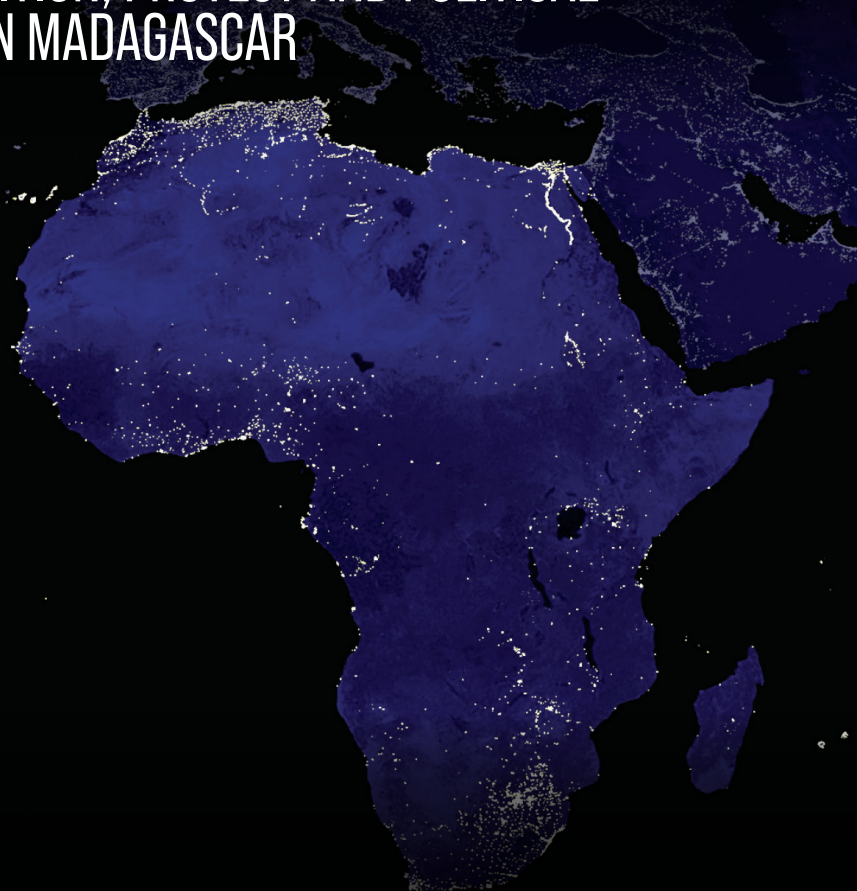




ELLIOT RANDRIAMANDRATO

GEN Z MADAGASCAR SPOKESPERSON

ON TRADITION, PROTEST AND POLITICAL
CRISES IN MADAGASCAR



the
6 CONVERSATIONS 
series

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The *Conversations* series presents interviews with prominent policymakers, experts and practitioners with instructive knowledge of countries in South, East and West Africa.

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Africa Research Institute (ARI) director Edward Paice met Elliot Randriamandrato in November 2025. Both were panel members in the inaugural edition of CNN's Global Perspectives: On Africa. In July 2026 they continued their discussion in Paris. This text is directly drawn from the transcript of that extended conversation. It is intentionally not distilled into convenient soundbites. In subsequent phone calls details were checked and the meaning of certain statements confirmed. Some phrases have been altered, and some clauses added, for clarity.

The views expressed in the *Conversations* series are those of the interviewees and not necessarily those of ARI.

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Tsy manaiky lembenana intsony!
Enough is Enough!
[Gen Z Madagascar slogan]

On 25 September 2025 tens of thousands of young protestors took to the streets in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, and other cities. University students were the most numerous, but many others also took part. Among the chief catalysts for discontent were the lamentable performance of Jirama, the national water and electricity utility. Permanent shortages and ever-longer outages had made life on student campuses – as well as conditions for businesses and the wider population – intolerable. Bad governance, corruption and nepotism, perceived as underlying causes of Jirama's incompetence, came equally under fire.

The Gen Z Mada protests were as distinctive as they were similar to those in other countries, including Nepal, Bangladesh and Morocco. All relied on imaginative and ingenious uses of social media and intelligence, but equally the principal grievances and catalysts differed country by country. In Madagascar, notably, the protestors ousted President Rajoelina and his government.

The individuals coordinating and leading such protests are seldom interviewed at length about their motivations and the underlying grievances of younger generations. Snippets are all there is space for in press reports and the attention of outsiders quickly moves on. The purpose of this publication is to record the thoughts and actions of a leading figure in greater detail. It is unlikely that Gen Z protests are simply a phase, given the extraordinary youthfulness of populations in so many countries in Asia and Africa. In Madagascar specifically, politics remain volatile. The events of September and October 2025 cannot be closed off.

In this context, the reflections of Elliot Randriamandrato are pertinent. As he explains, he took to the streets simply to show his support for the protests. However, he was quickly recruited by their coordinating group to be an official spokesperson. His perspective on events of late 2025 – and since – is instructive; and his opinions about how Madagascar's pre-colonial history demonstrably affects contemporary politics, the structure of the economy, relations with foreign businesses and much else besides are shared by many of his generation. Gen Z Mada may have dispersed for the time being, but all eyes are firmly on the actions and intentions of the transitional government headed by Colonel Michaël Randrianirina.

Edward Paice

ON THE STREETS

I began as a normal protestor on 25 September 2025. I went on my own into the streets of Antananarivo, the capital. There I saw some friends. It was like, 'Oh, you're here too'. We began to organise logistics that first day. We saw the repression, the heavy-handed law enforcement, and began to help by getting hold of masks to cover mouths and noses against the tear-gas, getting water and working out how to help people who were in danger and planning escape routes. It was all very spontaneous.

1 We noticed that communication was very disorganised on the first day. The protest was signalled on Facebook and Discord server groups and a lot of other social media platforms. It was just a call to march – there was no coordination. So, between us we began to coordinate, messaging about where there were smoke-bombs or where to avoid or where there were injured who needed help. We also began to film with our phones because the only journalists around at the beginning were local ones and they are often on the side of the regime. We explained the situation and what was happening factually. We wanted everyone around the country and in the diaspora to know the truth through images.

For example, there was looting on the first night and it was important to spread the news that this was nothing to do with the protestors – it was regime goons. They targeted certain areas far away from the main protests, looting shops and things like that. They weren't young and they weren't wearing black, which the protestors were. It was manipulation. The attempt to put the blame on us did not work. International media picked up on this. We were always one step ahead of the regime and made sure we controlled the narrative. We exposed what Rajoelina and his allies were up to and that made people even more angry. It increased our support.

I was already known as a democratic activist, criticising the corruption and undermining of fundamental rights. The first time I protested was in 2009 during Rajoelina's coup. I was 14 years old and doing my exams

at the time. My family's restaurant was firebombed, and we had to go and live with my grandmother. Then in August 2018 I had a face-to-face altercation with Rajoelina in Paris. I was at university, and he came to present his book – a blueprint for how he intended to govern if he won the presidential election that year – at some conferences and me and my friends protested. I became known then as there was a lot of news coverage back in Madagascar. Rajoelina actually named me and after that there were a lot of mafia-like moves to reveal where I lived and threaten my family on social media. I was very exposed, merely for protesting. But it meant that when I came back to Madagascar in 2025, young people knew who I was.

2 After 25 September I was contacted during the night by someone I trust who asked if I wanted to become involved. Naturally I said yes. I was invited into an encrypted message application and could see there was a group of about ten or a dozen. I was introduced to the administrators of the pages that had made the call to protest. Everyone was hiding their faces and using pseudonyms. I had no need to cover mine – they all knew who I was and the regime knew who I was.

We talked about what was going on and what needed to be done. We began to coordinate everything from that group, gathering more people on the encrypted messaging app and on Discord. Roles were assigned. I was put in charge of the field, or what we call the *service d'ordre*, planning where to march and escape routes with leaders of student groups in Antananarivo, how to protect protestors, how to bring water and assistance to wounded protestors. I had experience of student protests in Paris so I was trusted. I got deeply involved. It's not a secret anymore how we organised. Things have moved on from the protests to the political realm.

It was difficult for the youth who had jobs but wanted to support. There was a risk if they were identified and they worked for a UN agency or international NGO or in public administration. They are not meant to be partisan. It was the same for anyone who worked for big local companies. But as the protests continued more began to show up. Some people even came quietly from *Jirama*, the electricity and



2025

Select timeline for the Gen Z Madagascar protests to the ejection of Rajoelina

18 September

Faniry Albwan Rakotoarisoa (aka 'Gangstabb') and others protest in front of the Senate and call for a mass turnout at a demonstration on 25 September. He is arrested the next day, causing outrage among university students and others.

25 September

Gendarmes fire teargas and rubber bullets at protestors in Place de la Démocratie (May 13 Square) and around Antananarivo who criticise the deplorable state of the electricity and water utility, Jirama, and demand resignation of the government. Jirama is depicted as symbolic of bad governance and corruption. Rajoelina addresses the nation from New York.

28/29 September

President Rajoelina returns from New York and sacks his cabinet.

4 October

Amid continuing protests in Antananarivo Rajoelina begins consultations with a broad range of businesses and organisations.

6 October

Rajoelina appoints General Ruphin Fortunat Zafisambo prime minister.

8 October

Rajoelina offers to talk with protestors

11 October

CAPSAT, the army's corps of administrative and technical services, commanded by Colonel Michaël Randrianirina, orders security forces not to fire at protestors

12 October

CAPSAT soldiers escort protestors to occupy Place de la Démocratie (May 13 Square). Rajoelina reported to have fled Madagascar on a French military jet.

14 October

Rajoelina announced from an undisclosed location that he is dissolving the National Assembly. National Assembly deputies vote to impeach the absent Rajoelina. High Constitutional Court, comprised entirely of Rajoelina appointees, approves National Assembly's decision. Colonel Randrianirina announces that he and CAPSAT are 'taking responsibility' for the country with the approval of the High Constitutional Court. SADC declares that this does not constitute a coup. AU takes the opposite view.

17 October

Colonel Michaël Randrianirina sworn in as President of the Refoundation with a two-year mandate. The new president pays tribute to the courage of the Gen Z protestors. At least 28 people had been killed and more than 400 injured since the start of the protests. The High Constitutional Court, the electoral commission, the senate, the high court of justice and the high court of human rights are all dissolved. Rajoelina subsequently has his Malagasy citizenship rescinded.

20 October

Randrianirina appoints Herintsalama Rajaonarivelo prime minister.

28 October

Randrianirina names a 29-member government of civilians. Businessman and economist Herintsalama Rajaonarivelo appointed prime minister.

water company whose continual outages and shortages were a major catalyst to the protests. They explained to us why things were so bad and nothing was improving. That was interesting and useful.

The protests in 2025 were different to youth protests in the past. They weren't as large as some – in 2002, for example, there were hundreds of thousands on the streets for six months. But it was the first time that people like my friends and me have been so involved. Professionals and people from our backgrounds. Even the young from some of the Merina 'big families' took part, people who would never have dreamed of protesting before. It was also new for social media to have such an impact, to get extensive international coverage and for protests this big not to be organised and manipulated by political elites. We were very effective.

"IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN MADAGASCAR THAT PROTESTS THIS BIG WERE NOT ORGANISED AND MANIPULATED BY POLITICAL ELITES"

Our means of communication made it difficult for the regime or anyone to manipulate the protests, which is what usually happens. They tried to undermine us, but they didn't succeed. Some politicians even tried to get involved, but no one cared. They didn't speak our languages, our ways of expressing things, our 'code'.

There are so many groups under the title 'Gen Z'. The age bracket is not really the principal defining characteristic. It is heterogeneity that defines the movement. There are lots of entities, groups of people. It's mainly a mix of students from universities all around the country, young professionals and young workers, cultural and sports association, younger members of unions and NGOs. It is true, of course, that we are a very young nation. The median age is about 19 years and something like 70% of the population is under 30. All of us are excluded by the system and it does not know how to deal with us.

The diaspora was really engaged this time. Many of them had left after 2009 because they had stuff destroyed or saw their parents arrested in



the unrest. Everything was disrupted. A lot of my friends' families suffered or were traumatised. Many of us went abroad to study, to learn things, to learn history or business. We all had the objective of wanting to learn how to fix things. Now we want to return to Madagascar. Desperate regimes clinging on to power always blame 'foreign interference' when there are protests. It's a smokescreen but having diaspora on the streets provides them with an excuse.

Although Gen Z groups mobilised in other cities, there was not that much traction in rural areas and local communities. We weren't really organised to bring the cities and the countryside together. Some actions were taken but they attracted less attention than the ones in cities. It's one of the main criticisms of the movement, that we need to take into account rural youth more as they are experiencing the same problems and consequences of bad governance. This is fair, but it isn't easy.

5 Tradition dominates life in rural areas, although this is not to say they are not politicised. There have been rural uprisings in the past. In 1947 it was the Sakalava in the west who started the armed revolt against the colonial power. Farmers, coastal areas and students had a main role in the revolution in 1972 which deposed Tsiranana. We just need to connect better. The difficulty this time was that we organised digitally and few young people in the countryside have mobile phones, and phone and internet coverage is very poor. Where there is coverage there was some action.

Radio is still the main source of news in the countryside and we don't have access to that. Radio tends to be controlled by those in power. In many places the chief of the *fokontany*, the village, or the elders will tell people the news and it will then spread through the villages. Maybe we have to develop a traditional, practical way of sending information and messages around the country, an 'analogue' system.

My sister and I are like black sheep. People keep saying to us, 'how are your family with what you're doing? Aren't you on the wrong side?' We reply that it isn't a question of sides. It's a question of what the movement – and the country – wants and needs. The regime was

putting it around that some of the leading figures like me were privileged kids and we're using poor students for our own advantage. It was one of their main strategies to undermine the protests. Some people said it's ones from the big families trying to get control, the 'upper classes' or bourgeoisie. Others highlighted that some of us have French nationality as well as Malagasy. They said that the popular class of people were not protesting, and we come with ideas from abroad and don't know anything about our country. My sister and I were deliberately low profile at the start because we knew they would try this. Later we asked ourselves if we should back off, but we were not going to allow them to corrupt us. If my background can help in some way, I will use it. Sometimes you must change.

6 In a sense the movement is elitist, but not because there were more middle class and upper class on the streets alongside poorer students and workers. It's because the movement is more intellectual, more knowledgeable than any before. All the protestors have access to the internet. Anyway, it is ironic to accuse us of elitism when the regime we opposed was a government of the upper classes, of big families and big business interests.

"GEN Z MUST PLAY A ROLE IN WHAT COMES NEXT."

We are well placed to do it. We have seen 2002 and 2009 and 2018 and now 2025. We are also the last generation who read books as well as having the internet. We use both to look back through our history and we see the importance of that history and our culture and of making peace. We travel. We have met people from all over Africa, from Gen Z in Nepal, from whom we learned things about organising ourselves. We have been inspired by our knowledge and have a huge responsibility to succeed.

"OURS IS A HISTORY OF USURPATION"

Before I learned more from historians and my own research, I thought that what we are living through in Madagascar must be the



consequence of what happened in the colonial era. But no – what happened before the French or even the British came is still so relevant today.

"ACCESSION TO POWER NEARLY ALWAYS INVOLVES CRISIS"

At the end of the eighteenth century Andrianampoinimerina seized control of one of the four main Merina kingdoms in the central highlands after his uncle died. The uncle had a son who tried to succeed him, but he was defeated by Andrianampoinimerina. He then set about re-uniting the kingdoms which had been in a state of civil war for most of the century. When I look at all the political cycles since independence I see the same usurpation as Andrianampoinimerina's. Ours is a history of usurpation. Coup after coup – all our political transitions have come about with troubles and conflict except the appointment of the first president, Tsiranana, and possibly after the 2018 election, although it was very tense before it. In 75 years we only have a couple of straightforward alternances of power. Other than that, there is usurpation. Accession to power nearly always involves crisis.

After Andrianampoinimerina, Radama I conquered other Malagasy kingdoms, including the huge Sakalava kingdom in the west, the Betsileo south of Merina, the Antemoro and Antanosy in the south-east, and the Betsimisaraka in the east. These all had had their own distinctive histories, political systems and customs. There was a kind of unification of most of Madagascar – everyone was nominally answerable to the Merina monarchy – but in many respects the other kingdoms continued much as before. They remained organised around their own leaders and customs. This is the same today. Authority and succession are always contested. When we have elections, the winning candidate must visit the local king or leader, the *ampanjanka*, to get recognition. They work in a sort of collegial system with other local authorities, the *rayamandreny* or *olobe*. They are very powerful and command great respect. It is different from the republican democratic system, and much older.

Friends in the regions say to me there will always be contestation and tension between the real system, the local one, and the 'modern' one, which is not attuned or adapted to realities outside Antananarivo. Madagascar is very centralised – everything goes through Antananarivo and comes from Antananarivo. This creates huge antagonism. The regions want a more federal arrangement.

The old system wasn't federal, of course. The kingdoms were separate, but they knew how to work together, especially the main ones. I believe there was a saying long ago that went something like 'the Merina have the political power, the Sakalava have the military and commercial power, and the Antemoro have the cultural and religious power'. It's not the case now. The centre doesn't know how to work with others anymore, or doesn't want to. The technocracy and bureaucracy of the centre is something alien and distant to the regions.

FRACTURES

Religion created fractures in the exchanges between the Merina and the other kingdoms. The *foko* – the various ethnic and social groups of Madagascar – had different traditions, different ways of expressing things, different ceremonies. This was especially so with conflict resolution. There were traditional ways of solving conflict even when blood was shed. When the missionaries came and brought foreign ways of doing things the situation changed. Now, as you can see, we don't know how to resolve big conflicts well. We can eventually manage to find common ground when there is a crisis over elections. We say 'OK', we will accept it and we won't say anything – but big problems are not being addressed. Before, there were some ways of doing this between the *foko*. *Foko* not only means provinces and regions and so on, but little groups everywhere. Inside the *foko* we have the clans or lineages. These all played a part in resolving conflict. Inclusion was vital. Nowadays we find it impossible to include and involve everyone in a constitution consultation or a government that is well-suited for us.



1810

Andrianampoinimerina (b. circa 1740) dies. Succeeded by his son Radama I.

1817

Britain recognises Radama I as King of Madagascar.

1828

Radama I dies and is succeeded by his widow, Ranavalona I.

1861

Ranavalona I dies and is succeeded by her son Radama II.

1863

Assassination of Radama II in a palace coup. He is replaced by his widow Rasoherina I. Limitations to the powers of the monarchy are imposed by a powerful Hova faction of the court. In 1864, Rasoherina I dismisses her prime minister (and husband) and replaces him with (and marries) his brother, Rainilaiarivony. Rainilaiarivony is to remain prime minister and the power behind the throne until his death in 1895, marrying three successive queens.

1868

Rasoherina I dies and is succeeded by her cousin Ranavalona II. She, like Ranavalona, had been married to Radama II. She now marries prime minister Rainilaiarivony.

1883

Ranavalona II dies and is succeeded by a niece, Ranavalona III. French invasion begins the first Franco-Hova War. Peace treaty signed in 1886.

1894

Second Franco-Hova War begins after French troops land at Mahajanga in north-west Madagascar. Antananarivo captured in 1895.

1896

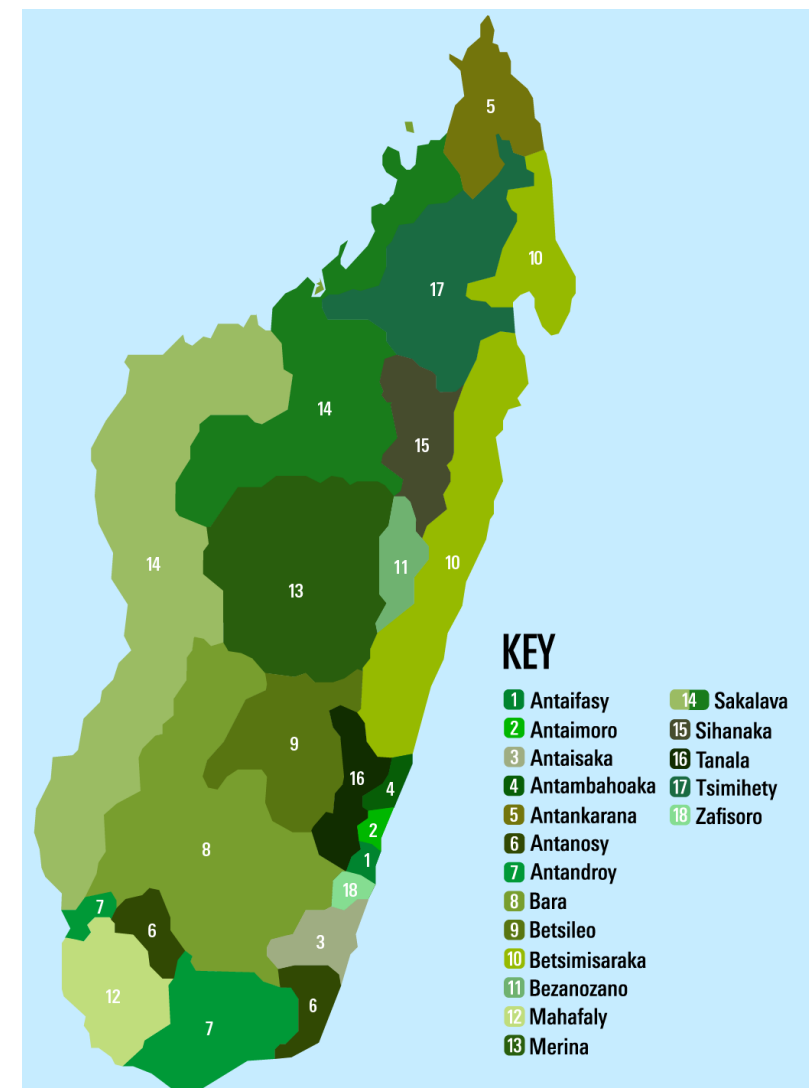
France annexes Madagascar. Rainilaiarivony exiled to Algeria. Slavery abolished.

1897

Monarchy abolished. Ranavalona III exiled to Réunion followed by Algeria.

10

The foko of Madagascar



(Credit: Adapted by Esme Hickman from Sary: Ethnic groups of Madagascar. Map created 7 Nov 2010. Reproduced and adapted under CC BY-SA 3.0)



In the time of the kings and queens, even if they wanted to go to war they had to have the approval of the *foko*. The king had to gather people together and talk with them in a forum. It's called *tokotelo*. It signified that big decisions required collaboration, and different people bringing their ideas together to make something work successfully. The king would ask for agreement about invading, say, the Sakalava. There would be speeches and poetical debate, *kabary*, a bit like lawyers do in court but more poetic. Consent was necessary. People could then say we argued this and won, or we advised caution on that and were listened to. After the fighting the king had to gather everyone again and tell them all the details. There had to be balance. This remains essential to the idea of community, *fihavanana*, in Madagascar.

The accession of the kings also required the approval of the *foko*. There was accountability, the *foko* helped to ensure accountability. This is not well known. Not much is written about it. Maybe this is why we are so confused about everything. The kingdoms had a way of separating their own powers – military, religious, political – and each clan in a *foko* had its own authority and responsibility. Some for religion, some for astrology, some were like oracles for the king. They had to give the OK for doing something, like deciding that conquest is propitious on a particular day or how conflicts should be resolved. Although there were kingdoms and nominated chiefs, there was participation.

Take the example of the Merina hierarchy. We were divided into sort of castes, or classes. There were nobles or royals, the *Andriana*; freemen, farmers, merchants, and administrators, the *Hova*; and the *Andevo*, slaves, who were almost half of the Merina population in the nineteenth century. These castes are still meaningful today. My family is *Hova*. Despite this hierarchy the king or queen was not determined mainly by heredity. Other things were more important, like power or wealth and spiritual things. You can see this in the actual name of King Andrianampoinimerina: *nampoinimerina* means the one who is appointed by the Merina. The astrologers prophesied that there would be someone with pale skin who the population would appoint king. To become the king or the representative you had to be approved by the *foko* and the other kingdoms. You were therefore accountable.

Tradition and customs were central.

Some of my older relations don't want to hear about traditional authorities and practices. For some it's nonsense because they are Christian and traditional stuff is like idolatry and blasphemy. On the other hand, some are traumatised by the religiosity of their parents. They don't want to hear anything about religion. Most of them just want a career and a family. If they have a business and it is working, they don't want change even though the whole family lived through 2009 and 2018. They don't want to understand how those things happened. They are the same about the immense environmental damage being suffered by this country. They don't see it, they don't want to know whose fault it all is, why it keeps happening or how it could be stopped.

ORAL TRADITIONS, THE WRITTEN WORD

The increasing influence of missionaries after they arrived in the 1820s began to impact the way that people saw different authorities. Christianity fostered a providential way of seeing kings and chiefs – and later presidents – as people who were going to save the situation. It disrupted traditional systems, the way people solved conflicts and the way of electing someone, and accountability diminished as new figures of authority were imposed. The days when people could say 'you're not worthy [of your position anymore]' and for it to count for something were numbered. This conception of things has disappeared in our politics. Now you can do a bad job as an official or minister for years without paying attention to anyone.

When Radama I asked the missionaries to write down the Malagasy language in the Roman alphabet this also undermined traditional customs and accountability. Before that we had *sorabe*, the Antemoro written version of Malagasy based on Arabic script, but it wasn't widely used. A bit in trade and in the court, but not at all in poetry and all cultural things. The written word complicated our politics. As constitutions and laws and so on are written down people feel they



are imposed. So they often try to circumvent them or disrespect them. In France and many other countries the law is respected because it is codified. For us, it's different. It's a cultural thing – our culture is oral. We still don't really respect what is written simply because it is written. Everything is a matter of how things are expressed, interpreted, how you feel about something. Interpretation is one of the fundamentals of our culture, I would say. Even if something is written, you can still interpret it differently, it can mean something different in a different context. I might agree with something in one context, but in a different one I'm not OK with what I said before.

Other consequences came from writing down the language because it was the Merina language. Even today people ask, 'why is it the main language?' There is Malagasy, our common language, but eighteen or more dialects with different ways of saying things. You can have a word or way of saying something that is the same in all dialects but not in the Merina one. Yet it's the Merina one, the dialect of the capital and the central highlands, that is official because it was written. All others can understand each other, but the Merina not always so with some of the dialects.

TRADE AND POWER

Another factor that remains relevant today is even older. We, and especially the Merina, must acknowledge that beginning in the 16th century we enslaved people on the island whose regions we conquered. This was still the way when the Merina expanded under Radama I. We depended on slave labour and were slave traders. It wasn't just the Merina, the Sakalava and others were the same. Later we imported slaves, mostly *Makoa* from eastern Africa. Slavery was the basis of the domestic economy and commerce in Madagascar. It played a huge role in the organisation of Malagasy society.

"SLAVERY WAS THE BASIS OF THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY AND COMMERCE IN MADAGASCAR"

The Hova backed and benefitted from the expansion begun by Andrianampoinimerina – it increased their market share in trade and with it their power. They became able to trade out of almost all parts of the island. This caused friction between the Merina and the *côtiers*, the coastal peoples. So did foreigners, who traded with the Merina, but also with other *foko* like the Sakalava. Foreigners knew how to co-operate with landowners and elites and exploit existing economic interests and networks. For example, coffee was one of the main resources in the colonial era. There were a few Merina families who controlled coffee production and they sold directly to French agents like the *Compagnie Marseillaise de Madagascar* who arranged shipping and export for selling in Europe. Vanilla was the same. Wood the same. The same had been true of slaves.

Radama I kept European commercial and political interests in check. After him Ranavalona I, his wife, who came to power through a coup backed by the army, was more conservative. You could say she was absolutist. Even Jean Laborde, a French engineer who came to Madagascar from India and became one of the main manufacturers of firearms, had to play by her rules. He was appointed by the queen to create a huge factory at Mantsoa, in the centre of the country, where there was water and wood for a foundry. He couldn't have done it without her approval and that of the powerful Hova families.

Ranavalona's son, Radama II, was different. When he succeeded her in the 1860s and wanted to claw back economic power for the *Andriana* and bring in more foreign businesses again, powerful interests including leading Hova families plotted to get rid of him. It was another coup. They also killed Andriana in the trading posts, ministers and others. It was really the end of a powerful Merina monarchy. You still hear people say 'Oh, it's the 48 big *Hova* families that still hold power in Madagascar'. The wars against France in the 1880s and 1890s are known as the Franco-Hova wars, not the Franco-Merina or Franco-Malagasy wars.



Power today in Madagascar is still about control of the *comptoirs*, the main trading posts created by the slave trade – Diego, Tamatave, Majunga, Tuléar and so on, and control of the centralised administration in Antananarivo. We know very precisely – everyone knows – who controls the economy in each part of the country. We can name the families. As I say, the economic structure, including the massive resource extraction, predates the colonial era, as does the antagonism between the capital and the coastal areas.

"THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE PREDATES THE COLONIAL ERA,
AS DOES THE ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THE CAPITAL AND THE
COASTAL AREAS"

Foreign incursion and involvement remain a very big issue to this day, very emotive. Everything is orientated to extraction of resources and export without distributing anything to the population. We didn't develop from within. We didn't know how to. We relied on foreigners. I'm not a historian, but I've never heard of an example of anyone trying to use Madagascar's resources for the island's own development. Everything was always orientated around trade with foreigners, Oceanic, Omani and Arabic, East African then British, French and so on. Kingdoms remained quite autonomous and all of them were orientated towards their own trade. It was always Malagasy families and individuals dealing with foreign agents for their own benefit. We have never really operated as a country, a nation dealing with other nations. We never came together to discuss how we managed things. That's how it appears to me.

SPEAKING FOR GEN Z MADAGASCAR

On 9 October 2025 I was arrested during a protest and taken to a *gendarmérie* camp. There were eleven of us detained, three from my area of the protest. I am sure I was targeted. It would have been very difficult to identify me as a coordinator of the protest. They knew exactly where I was. None of us who were taken knew each other by sight or by name, although we knew each other's anonymous

'handles'. We didn't get questioned or interrogated because our families and friends mobilised in a big way and secured our release before nightfall when the inspectors were going to come. But our faces were exposed on the news and elsewhere. So three of us were appointed as spokespeople by the group of coordinators of the movement. This had grown to about two hundred individuals. As I was no longer anonymous it seemed natural to me. Others chose to stay anonymous.

In April 2026, the regime arrested four 'leaders'. One of the things they were accused of was being involved in a coup plot by a colonel who had been sacked by the transitional regime in January. I know those people, but the movement remains leaderless. We deliberately don't have appointed leaders. Maybe the media decided to describe the four as leaders, or maybe they themselves said they were leaders. By that time the movement was very broad. There were lots of little groups here and there. The arrested ones were not from the main group of coordinators and people did not take to the streets *en masse* when they were arrested. Besides, I have been told they were involved in the coup attempt in some way. Apparently, they accepted money from those plotting the coup to stage a protest. We all knew what they were up to and something wasn't right about it. September was spontaneous, this wasn't.



The adapted 'Jolly Roger' logo created by local artist paio.be for Gen Z Mada to 'reflect the commitment of a conscious youth, capable of linking universal struggles with a cultural and political identity deeply rooted in Madagascar'. The Jolly Roger flag is from the Japanese manga series 'One Piece' in which the Straw Hat Pirates oppose authoritarianism in all forms. After first appearing in Indonesia in July 2025, it was adopted as a symbol of peaceful popular resistance Morocco, Nepal, Paraguay and the Philippines. In Madagascar, the highly symbolic Betsileo 'satro-bory' hat was used. #DemokrasiaMainty, the words at the bottom, equates to #PeoplePower. Source, accreditation and permission: Gen Z Madagascar.

Information and shared intelligence remain vital to the movement, especially from whistle-blowers and insiders. These can be from the military or politics or anywhere. They provide reliable, credible information and must be trustable. We're trying to put in place an anonymous system for people to tell us politically useful things. Information can give us a seat at the table with institutions, with



international NGOs, as opposed to being only on the outside. We need to be a political force, not just youth protesters. As I said after we finished the Rajoelina regime, the hard work starts now.

THE GENERATIONS AND DISTRUST

There is a big generational issue in Madagascar and that is a hindrance. There is a generation of politicians, especially, who don't want to give up power. They don't want the system to change, so they try to diminish the youth movement in the media. They say the youth are not mature enough to lead or to have a role in governing. To them the protests were a hysterical reaction to something that is now over. It was 'nothing'. Now it's up to them – the 'grown-ups' – to manage the situation. 'You should go back to school now. It's over', they say. It's astonishing. Even the Colonel, the interim president, says this. 'We get the message, but you need to learn politics first if you want to go any further' – that's their main argument. The protests weren't 'nothing', and it's a very condescending way of excluding us. The new regime and those backing it are fighting for survival. It's a mistake to say, 'go back to school'. We heard it. It is a clear provocation although Malagasy are not that into confrontation. This may sound surprising as the system is overthrown by force every few years.

"THEY SAY THE YOUTH ARE NOT MATURE ENOUGH TO LEAD OR TO HAVE A ROLE IN GOVERNING"

Respect for one's elders is a very, very important tradition in Madagascar. But we are educated more than many of them. We have worked. We can see that there is mass poverty in the country and it's getting worse. And we have proved that we can overthrow something that we disagree with. What is their politics achieving? Do *they* know politics? These last few years they could have done something, and they didn't. It's down to politicians that we have lower GDP per capita than at Independence in 1960. Now they appoint the FFKM, the Christian churches committee, to lead the national conference - 'the elders must oversee the consultation'. To outsiders this may look

sensible, but the churches in Madagascar are political. They have been active participants in political conflicts and violence in the past.

There's a Malagasy expression *fanjakana rayamandreny*. *Fanjakana* is the state, the government, the one who governs. *Amandreny* means 'parents' or 'the elders'. Basically, it means 'the elders are the authority'. They're saying to us 'we are the adults. You don't have a say'. The Gen Z movement has shown that this cultural concept is being opposed. We won't have it anymore. We don't care about that bit of our culture anymore. Culture is not static.

Many young people are very impatient with oppression by their parents' generation. Older ones like me are in the middle. We understand some things better. We've seen the damage of more conflicts, so we can see both sides. We need to try and influence. We all have to talk. Maybe we can make peace with our parents too. There's another concept we challenge – *tany razana*, 'the land of the ancestors'. We say instead *tany zanaka*, now it's time for 'the land of the children'. To some older people this is a cultural earthquake, but it is literally what Madagascar is – a land of children and the young. They have to accept this and take us into account. We need to take them into account, sure. But if they want to change things too, they need us too. We need a new contract between us.

We need new contracts between a lot of groups if we are to escape the cycle and not find ourselves in exactly the same position in seven years' time, or whenever the next huge protests occur. New contracts between the big families and the population, the *Hova* and *Andriana*, the *Hova* and the common people, the regions and the *foko*, the Karana – the Indo-Pakistanis who are often accused of taking all our wealth and keeping us poor – and us, the ethnic Chinese and Muslims and us, and youth and the older generation. The traditional authorities. We, the youth, have our responsibilities but the old have theirs too. We must address these things and now is the time. Opportunists are taking advantage of the void. The Russians saw their chance to get involved very quickly. The Malagasy people must fill the void instead.



BUILDING A NATION

Since independence no leader has seriously tried to build a nation. Either because they didn't think like that idea, or they didn't know that they ought to make a social contract, or they didn't want to or were naïve. The system was already set up a particular way. It gave them a huge amount of power and they used the machine as it was. They didn't look to tradition for solutions or draw on the way things were decided in local areas and cultures.

Ratsiraka was maybe the only one who attempted a social contract, albeit through socialism and the Soviet system, not drawing on traditions. Was it a genuine attempt to unify the nation through education of the next generation, trying to move on from the traditional way of doing things? Was Ratsiraka right? Or was this too the wrong way to do things? Questions like these are hot topics to this day. He didn't just say 'OK, everything is working as it should'. But he had allies behind him, so did he follow socialism because he could, or as a political strategy to break from the past? Did he look to the Soviet Union and non-alignment simply to diminish the influence of France? It's hard to say he was trying to unify everyone because he moved against some regions. He favoured developing the east and other *foko* at the expense of the Merina and others.

I don't think it's impossible to do things differently. After all, Ratsiraka did, in his own way. So did Ravalomana later, in a completely different way to Ratsiraka. Even Rajoelina did, in a very capitalist way. Change can be done. Now is our chance, this year and next is our chance to do it. The question is how? Ratsiraka imposed his strategy on people using the system he inherited. So did the others. They all used the very centralised authority, and the people are used to that. I'm not saying go back to having a monarchy – no one wants that – but good leadership is necessary to take us back to a set of rules that everyone respects. A set of rules that's been constructed through a democratic and inclusive process. Things are not working now. They haven't worked since independence.

gatherings and talking things over for hours and hours and hours. Some say 'yes, yes, we should stop discussing and do more'. But this is how we are, so maybe we can use that to create this new set of rules – by having everyone involved. No one really asks the opinion of the people the way it used to be done. It's about creating the right system. It's not about powerful leaders – we've tried everything there: Merina, non-Merina, socialist, capitalist. It's about leadership – to change the system and have institutions that listen and take people into account in a proper way.

"THINGS ARE NOT WORKING NOW. THEY HAVEN'T WORKED SINCE INDEPENDENCE"

How to develop the country – educate people, build infrastructure and hospitals, provide water – is a complicated issue. You could easily argue that more was done under the 18th century rulers than since independence. I believe the regions have to have greater real autonomy to manage things, especially regarding budgets. Everything comes from the centre. Taxation goes to the centre, to the *caisse unique*, and then the centre decides how that money will be spent. It's a huge problem. There is no fiscal decentralisation at all. What goes to Antananarivo mostly stays in Antananarivo. Huge resources are collected in some regions that never come back to those regions. The system is also inefficient. You have to wait for the centre to approve everything. It's no surprise that the *fokontany*, the villages, don't want to pay taxes on that basis. People need to have resources to manage their localities properly.

I'm not talking about having a federal system. I don't think we're ready for that. You don't want to create 24 different nations with different laws, their own military and self-reliant for their budget. They will fight against each other. Some regions, especially in the south are poorer than others – very poor – and they would suffer immediately. They're very exposed to environmental issues. Federation would only be conceivable when there is a more level playing field, if ever. Otherwise, parts of the country will be even more isolated than now. Real decentralisation needs to come first and then greater autonomy.

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There are steps being taken to decentralise, but they are not being done well. I think you need elected regional presidents – not nominated officials, the way things are now. The same for heads of communes and even *fokontany* – they should be elected not nominated by the central power. These regional presidents should have their own budgets and be held accountable by the people of the region. Maybe the current divisions are not the right ones either, maybe divisions along the lines of the main historic kingdoms would be best with a college of their presidents. This would have a certain cultural logic about it for people. There is a plan to do something along these lines, but it has not been well thought out.

SECURING A FUTURE

In November 2025, we were hopeful that our voices would be heard. The interim president, Colonel Randrianarina, said publicly that the youth would be involved in the refoundation of the country. He paid tribute to us. A lot of promises were made after Gen Z Madagascar forced out the Rajoelina regime, but these haven't been fulfilled yet. There is a dialogue going on, but there is no Gen Z movement representative in the national consultation that was meant to begin in June. As I said, they've given the main role in that to the FFKM, the Ecumenical Council of Christian Churches. Promises about elections and other things have not been met, there's no sign of institutions like parliament, the electoral commission, the high constitutional court being recomposed in a fair way. Almost everything has the same people as before or has replacements who are insiders.

Select political timeline for 2026, the aftermath

- 19 February
Colonel Michaël Randrianirina visits President Putin in Moscow.
- 28 February
Programme for the Refoundation of the Republic of Madagascar published by the presidency, with 'sovereign national consultation' to commence in June and last six months. The Programme's text acknowledges failure of the state. Objectives include electoral governance reform, a new constitution approved by referendum and presidential election. Gen Z movement not consulted ahead of the Programme's publication.
- 9 March
Colonel Michaël Randrianirina dismisses the prime minister and government he appointed in December 2025 and appoints a new one.
- 15 March
Mamitiana Rajaonarison named as prime minister, replacing Herintsalama Rajaonarivelo.
- 7 April
State of emergency declared over energy supply due to the Iran war.
- 28 April
13 suspects arrested for allegedly plotting the assassination of Colonel Michaël Randrianirina. Alleged ringleader is Colonel Patrick Rakotomaminjy, formerly of the president's office. President of Malagasy electoral authority visits Moscow and announced electoral officials will participate in a course convened by Russia's electoral authority.
- June
National consultation does not begin as scheduled due to disagreements between government and consultation coordinator, the Ecumenical Council of Christian Churches (FFKM). 'Even before the consultations have begun, some pronouncements already hint at rivalries for leadership, competition for legitimacy, and attempts at symbolic appropriation. This is a luxury the country cannot afford'. (Jean Fidelis Ranaivoson, 'Refoundation – is it still a time for ambiguity?', L'Express Mada, 4 June).
- August
National consultation yet to start.

"WHAT WE ASK FOR IS TRANSPARENCY"

We must have more transparent ways of choosing the judges in the next High Constitutional Court, the members of a new parliament, municipal officials – all public bodies. The members of the High Constitutional Court are being replaced, but by being discredited on some charge or other and replaced with appointees of the regime. We don't really even know for certain who these people are. What we ask for is transparency. This is important because at the moment there is no separation of powers in Madagascar. If the regime simply appoints people there's no separation of powers. The electoral commission is still led by the man appointed by Rajoelina. That's not OK any more than appointing a placeman now would be OK. Now we see the commission taking advice and assistance from the electoral commission of Russia. You see the problem. This is not an improvement. This is not fair or transparent. We will push for representation on the electoral commission.

23 All this should be addressed in a new constitution following a proper nationwide consultation. Even if the consultation is well done the referendum on the new constitution is not scheduled before a presidential election. We want it to be before. It's not logical or credible to have it after. These are the sort of issues that we want in the open to change the pattern of things in Madagascar. Right now the signs are very, very bad. We can't have an election orchestrated by Russian advisers and where all the presidents of the *fokontany*, who will be responsible for overseeing and counting the votes, have been nominated. That's why we – the Gen Z movement – need to try and be a political force.

The Colonel and those around him are totally confident that they can simply reconstitute the system as before but with a different set of people. We completely oppose this. We didn't fight just to see everything reproduced. People are saying 'you have to protest again', but that is not so simple. There are some internal disagreements and conflicts inside the movement about the final objective, the arrest of those four so-called 'leaders' did not look good, many students have

moved on with their lives. The main problem is that we don't appoint a leader or leaders. During the protests that was very useful – you can't cut off a head when there is no head. Now we need leadership to bring everyone together around the same political project that is not only centred on the fact we are young.

We still have leverage, and we know what we already achieved. In an election, youth – from the Gen Z movement, the students, young workers – are a massive majority. We need to be relevant to the different circumstances now. If we don't succeed the position of young people will stay the same. Most will remain poor, with no opportunities, no jobs, no respect and no involvement in the affairs of our country which will remain controlled by various mafias.

24 As a movement we weren't ready for the politics that followed the coup. In hindsight we should have said that Gen Z Madagascar had won and were taking power. We should have had someone to put forward as a first minister. OK, the Colonel was president, but we should have insisted that the prime minister was our person. Even if we had our time again this wouldn't have been easy. We didn't see any good people in politics to put forward. We had a blacklist of people we said should have no part in a new set-up and the new regime respected that. What we should have done is insist on a good technocrat. Someone who could be trusted to take things forward in a proper way. There are some who could have done this. Maybe then the story might have been different. The new regime might have said OK, like they said OK to the blacklist. We missed a chance.

It's not over. For now, we wait. We may have lost the upper hand, but we will respond again if what happens with the national consultation and everything else is a sham. It's already a sham. The regime fear some of us – a lot. I don't know why. They didn't fear the four who they arrested. Our silence makes them nervous. We have not criticised them in public about anything. We just wait and they have been weakened by all sorts of events since April. When they held a youth conference in early August everything was about territory – federalism and the regions. There was no mention of security and that has been



getting worse and worse. Kids have been disappearing. The situation is heated.

We have met the prime minister, both the former one and the current one, and the president. The Colonel seems an honest, straight guy. We talked a lot back in May. He says what he thinks and explained various things, why his room for manoeuvre is limited in some respects, how he sees things. He made some promises, now we expect meaningful gestures.

We aren't out to grab roles or positions and we are eager to help if things are done on the right principles. We have made it very clear that if they don't respect principles we can start again. We are accountable to everyone who protested; and we are ready to hold the regime to account. In the meantime, we try to sort disagreements in the Gen Z movement, and we must be ready to ensure our views are heard and included in the agenda for the *Refondation* when we are consulted. This is our strategy.

Select political timeline from Independence to the 2023 election

- 1960
Independence from France.
- 1965
Philibert Tsiranana re-elected president.
- 1971
Farmers revolt in the south.
- 1972
Philibert Tsiranana re-elected unopposed for a second time. However, following strikes and massive student protests nationwide he is forced to cede effective control of government in May to General Ramanantsoa, Army chief of staff. In an October referendum a substantial majority gives Ramanantsoa a five-year mandate. Riots in coastal towns at the end of the year continue into the next.
- 1975
After many months of deepening economic crisis and political in-fighting, including a coup attempt in December 1974, General Ramantasoa resigns in February and hands over power to the minister of the interior, Colonel Richard Ratsimandrava. One week after assuming power Ratsimandrava is assassinated. Military directorate assumed power.
- 1975
Didier Ratsiraka, a member of the military directorate, made head of state in June. Second Republic created and programme of 'Scientific Socialism' initiated.
- 1982
Ratsiraka re-elected amid worsening economic crisis. Attempt to impose a one-party state defeated by parliamentary opposition. Cycle of riots and food shortages begins.
- 1989
Massive protests follow delayed and disputed presidential election in which Ratsiraka is again re-elected.
- 1990
Political parties re-instated.
- 1991
Five months of near anarchy even greater than the 1972 *rotaka* (revolution) commence in June. Hundreds of thousands join marches in Antananarivo and a general strike is declared. Repressive measures become increasingly violent. In July 'alternative' government headed by Albert Zafy is declared by Forces Vives movement. In August four of the six provinces declare 'independence' as federal states. An agreement between Forces Vives and Prime Minister Guy Razanamary ensues to begin a transition concluding with the exit from politics of President Ratsiraka. Zafy is made head of the newly established High Transition Authority. Ratsiraka refuses to relinquish the presidency and says he will contest new elections.
- 1993
Albert Zafy defeats Ratsiraka in presidential election.
- 1996
Zafy resigns after impeachment and is defeated by Ratsiraka in November election.
- 2001
Disputed election in December with Ratsiraka facing off against businessman and mayor of Antananarivo, Marc Ravalomanana.

2002

Ravalomanana does not accept the result denying him an absolute majority and declares himself president in February. Mass protests and two-month general strike commence. State of emergency declared. Fears of civil war. In April, High Constitutional Court confirms after a recount that Ravalomanana had won the election with 51% of the vote to Ratsiraka's 36%. Four out of six provinces declare independence. Fears of civil war. Ratsiraka sets up 'his' government in Toamasina. In July, Ratsiraka leaves Madagascar for France.

2006

Ravalomanana re-elected. New constitution approved by referendum the following year.

2009

In March, the military forces Ravalomanana to relinquish power after youth protests in which 30 were shot dead in a single location. Ravalomanana flees to South Africa. Troops from CAPSAT, the army's corps of administrative and technical services, occupy the presidential palace. Ravalomanana's leading opponent, 34-year-old Andry Rajoelina, mayor of Antananarivo and media mogul, assumes power at the head of a High Transitional Authority. Madagascar expelled from Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) following the 'coup' and African Union suspends Madagascar's membership. In November, rebel soldiers attempt a coup.

2010

AU imposes sanctions on Rajoelina and his government for failing to implement a power-sharing deal. EU suspends development aid.

2011

Under pressure from SADC and other international bodies 'Roadmap for Ending the Crisis' signed by major political factions in September providing for elections in 2013.

2013

Ravalomanana and Rajoelina are prevented from standing in the presidential election by an unpopular SADC-brokered compromise referred to as *ni ni* (neither nor). Both men back candidates. Rajoelina nominee Hery Rajaonarimampianina wins with 54% of the vote on a 50% turnout. Presidential handover follows in January 2014. Rajoelina moves to France.

2018

Following months of protests over controversial electoral laws Rajaonarimampianina and Ravalomanana are defeated by former president Rajoelina in presidential election.

2023

Rajoelina re-elected with 59% of the vote.

MADAGASCAR MISCELLANY

Size: 591,896 km² (228,532 sq. miles)

Relative size: 21st largest country in Africa – approximately the same size as Kenya (582,646 km²/ 224,961 sq. miles) and Botswana (570,162 km²/ 220,141 sq. miles)

GDP/cap (constant 2015 dollars): US\$456.5 (vs. US\$812 in 1960, making Madagascar the only non-conflict country globally to grow poorer since independence)

Population: 33.5m (1960: 5m) [UN Population Prospects, 2024 Revision]

Pop density vs others: 56 people/ km² - similar to South Africa [World Bank data]

Population living on less than US\$3/ day: 20.5 million, roughly two-thirds of the population [World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook, April 2026]

Power generation: installed +/- 400MW (sufficient to power 300-400,000 homes in a high-income country), available +/- 250MW [July 2026, evidence from Jirama]

Population with access to electricity: 36% (7% in rural areas) [AfDB]

Population with internet access: 19% [World Bank data]

Paved roads: less than 6,000 kms

Life expectancy at birth: 61.9 years (male), 65.4 years (female) [UN Population Prospects, 2024 Revision] Adult literacy rate: 75% [UNESCO]





Elliot Randriamandrato

Gen Z Madagascar spokesperson

Elliot Randriamandrato is a spokesperson for Gen Z Madagascar

Randriamandrato was born and raised in Madagascar. He is a political science and government graduate of Sciences Po, where he also completed a master's degree in public policy analysis. He has a master's degree in global risk and crisis management from University of Paris I: Panthéon-Sorbonne.

Randriamandrato has worked in consultancy roles for a decade and is president of Tetikasa Ala, an association which provides innovative solutions to address deforestation, agricultural under-development and the impact of climate change in Madagascar.

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