

Madagascar begins voting in runoff presidential election

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A man gestures before he casts his ballot paper during a runoff presidential election in Antananarivo, Madagascar, Wednesday, Dec. 19, 2018. (AP Photo: Themba Hadebe)

Madagascar: Voters have begun casting their ballots across the Indian Ocean island nation of Madagascar Wednesday to select a new president in a runoff election that pits two former leaders against each other.

Andry Rajoelina, 44, president from 2009 to 2014, received 39 per cent of the vote in the first round in November, while Marc Ravalomanana, 69, president from 2002 to 2009, got 35 per cent. They face off for the first time since political turmoil in 2009 forced Ravalomanana from power. Both have said they will accept the runoff's results.

Ten million voters are registered in Madagascar, a former French colony which is ranked by the World Bank as one of the world's poorest nations, although rich in ecological diversity. More than two-thirds of the island's population of 25 million live in extreme poverty, while corruption is reportedly widespread.

Campaigning in the election was largely peaceful. The capital, Antananarivo, has been vibrant in the final days before the vote with the orange T-shirts of Rajoelina and the white and green ones of Ravalomanana worn by hundreds of supporters.

- AP