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GO

Welcome Guest

[Home](#) > [Heritage](#) > [Ballots and Bombs in Zanzibar](#)

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### Ballots and Bombs in Zanzibar

Photo: A Civic United Front supporter is beaten by Tanzanian riot police near Stone Town, Zanzibar, Oct. 30, 2000. Riot police fired live rounds of ammunition and baton-charged some 300-stone throwing followers of the opposition CUF, who were protesting the failure of the Zanzibar Electoral Commission to deliver ballots for Sunday's elections to 16 of the districts where the CUF was expected to do well. AP Photo/Sayyid Azim

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Two months after Amani Karume won the presidency of Zanzibar in a bitterly disputed election, a December 26 bombing has made it clear that the Indian Ocean island's political woes have yet to be resolved.

"The crisis is still going on," Karume admitted while meeting with Zanzibar religious leaders in the town of Baraza two days after explosion, which damaged the offices of Zanzibar Electoral Commission in Pemba. No one was injured in the blast, the last in a series of bombings, and no arrests have been made. According to the Panafrikan News Agency, businesspeople and foreigners have begun to leave for the mainland, fearing for their safety, and the crisis has sparked an economic recession.

The Republic of Tanzania is a political union — engineered in 1964 by the late Julius Nyerere and Abeid Karume, father of Zanzibar's current president — between Zanzibar, its neighbor island, Pemba, and mainland Tanganyika.

The Boxing Day bombing is just the most recent in a pattern of political conflict that has historic roots and gained new impetus after the October 29, 2000, Tanzanian election, the second under the country's new multiparty system. In Zanzibar the voting was marred by violent police beatings of protesters accusing the ruling party of electoral fraud. Beyond the conflict over ballots, however, lie deep tensions about religious and ethnic identity on this small island whose people claim African and Arab heritage.

Karume was sworn in as president of Zanzibar on November 8th in front of a crowd of 20,000 in Amani stadium. He called for unity and reconciliation in a ceremony that was boycotted by opposition leaders and western representatives, all of whom had demanded new elections. Only days later, a series of bombs shook the island and seriously wounded an official of the electoral commission, the BBC reported.

While unification with Tanganyika had afforded Zanzibar certain concessions, debates around autonomy versus union with the mainland have bedeviled Zanzibari politics for decades and remain a thorn in Tanzania's political side. Since Tanzania's first multiparty election in 1995, this issue has often been a source of conflict between the Civic United Front (CUF), the Pemba-based opposition party, which has called for greater autonomy, and the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution), the party of Karume and the president of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa.

Nathalie Arnold, an anthropologist at Indiana University, says Zanzibari nationalism is a reaction to the 1964 unification. "Zanzibaris had to be called Africans and were forced to deny their Indian Ocean heritage," she says. "Zanzibaris are reacting to this pressure from the mainland to incorporate Zanzibar as another province. The idea of pan-Africanism was created by foreigners and the Union loosely arranged with American pressure."

In the 1995 election, CUF accused the president-elect of Zanzibar, Salim Amour, of fraud and refused to participate in the parliament for the past three-and-a-half years. Efforts by the former secretary general of the Commonwealth, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, to negotiate an agreement have failed.

In the 2000 election, Tanzania's electoral commission said Amani Karume won 67 percent of the vote, with the remaining 33 percent going to the CUF's Sharif Hamad. (On the mainland, the incumbent president, Benjamin Mkapa, won 72 percent of the votes and a second term in office.) CUF rejected the results, and said it would not recognize the new government. The ruling party has accused CUF of masterminding the recent bombings, but the opposition party has denied the allegations.

In weeks leading up to the 2000 election, supporters of the two parties clashed frequently. Hamad led popular protests against the CCM government and its human rights violations, particularly the imprisonment of 18 high-ranking CUF officials arrested in 1997 on charges of trying to overthrow the island's government. Hamad's diplomatic initiatives eventually resulted in the suspension of foreign aid to Zanzibar.

The election itself was plagued by violence, long delays and a lack of election materials in polling stations, according to international observers. The Commonwealth observer team reported that the elections were a "shambles" and revealed a "colossal contempt" for democracy. President Mkapa's office released a statement in response: "I am strongly made to

believe that following the breakdown of the agreement by the Commonwealth Secretariat last year, the group set out to determine that the elections in Zanzibar could and would not possibly be fair and free."

The opposition CUF party called for new presidential and parliamentary elections under new observers in all of Zanzibar's fifty constituencies, claiming that ballot papers had been stolen and registration lists mishandled. The CUF warned of more violence and threatened to boycott both the Union Parliament and the Zanzibar House of Representatives.

The ruling CCM party agreed to new elections only in the 16 constituencies where "irregularities" had occurred, acknowledging that some election officials had acted inappropriately. It also accused the CUF of "lying and grabbing votes," and refused to bow to international pressure or threats of an opposition boycott with a flat statement: "The CCM will never accept that voting will be repeated across Zanzibar."

While the government has accused the CUF opposition of extremism and inflexibility, Arnold articulates another view. "The CUF has been open to reconciliation and has worked actively to achieve it. It is the government which bluntly and without any attempt at concealment failed to uphold the Commonwealth-brokered agreement of May 1998," Arnold says. "The CCM has frequently insulted CUF people," she adds, recalling that former Zanzibar president Amour called Pembans "vibuzi marika" (small, ridiculous goats), and that they were branded "dogs" — "vijibuya vya santuri" — by Ali Hassan Mwinyi, former president of Zanzibar and then Tanzania after Nyerere.

Press descriptions of CUF members as Muslim fundamentalists irk other Zanzibar-watchers. "The Western media are not well-informed about what's taking place. They rely on government sources and local newspapers, which lean towards the government," says Khalfan Mohammed, a Zanzibari student of law at Indiana University. "CUF is made up of all sorts of people. Its top leaders came from the ruling party, a splinter group. The current head of the CUF was secretary of the CCM."

Mohammed maintains that the CUF officials are dissenters from what they see as CCM's abuse of power and corrupt economic policies. He asserts that most CUF leaders come from CCM's parent Afro-Shirazi party and are neither pro-Arab nor interested in returning to Arab rule. Besides, says Mohammed, "in Zanzibar, you can't identify who's Arab and who's not, there's so much mixed blood."

The CUF emerged from the 2000 election with 16 seats, all in its base, Pemba. Zanzibar's new president Karume sounded conciliatory, lamenting the long-term detention of CUF members ("I cannot do anything as it is in the law courts, but I hope it will be disposed of soon to bring peace and solidarity to Zanzibar"), and promising tax reforms and an anti-corruption campaign.

On November 18, in his maiden speech to the House of Representatives, Karume called for unity. "My advice to Hamad is that he should accept the people's verdict," the new president was quoted in Agence-France Press. "It is my hope that CUF will consider national unity and relieve people of problems arising from elections."

The recent bombings, however, make conciliation difficult. The government arrested 40 opposition supporters, alleging that they belong to a militant wing of the CUF called "the blue guard." CUF leaders and supporters

accuse the government of staging the explosions as a pretext for arresting CUF members.

"The CCM government is setting off bombs in order to execute arrests of youths," declares Nathalie Arnold. "If Islam is responsible for anything in Zanzibar it is for maintaining peace. Rather than inciting anyone to violence, it is people's religious faith that has contributed most significantly to continued nonviolence and forbearance in the face of a government which is increasingly, by any standards, immoral."

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