

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Abstract

In 2008, Madagascans tended to hold a somewhat mixed and increasingly dim view of the state of their national economy. 28% of Madagascans thought their economy was in a poor state and 24% viewed it as healthy – 11 percentage points lower than in 2005. The remaining 48% had no definite opinion, indicating a degree of perplexity concerning the general state of the economy. An even greater cause for concern is Madagascans' distinctly negative view of their personal living standards. Just 17% of Madagascans claimed they were satisfied with their current living standards, as opposed to 25% in 2005. Many Madagascans face shortages, and access to medicine and clean water has worsened since 2005. People in rural areas are the most severely affected by this trend.

In addition to the gloomy state of the economy, another major concern is the widespread fear of insecurity. Nearly 30% of Madagascans fear being physically attacked in their own homes, especially in rural areas. While these concerns are not as widespread in urban areas, they are on the increase in rural areas, which indicates that the recent measures designed to tackle these issues have not been enough to reassure the Madagascan people. The fight against crime and insecurity is becoming the primary concern of Madagascans, ahead of poverty, agricultural development and employment, which are all issues that the authorities need to address as a matter of priority.

Despite this unfavourable climate, Madagascans remain generally optimistic about the future prospects of the state of their country and of their living standards. Yet since 2005, this sense of confidence has been seriously eroded. Combined with an increasingly critical view of the entire range of policies implemented by the government, the authorities need to interpret these warning signs as an indication that they need to act swiftly.

Introduction

The *Afrobarometer* public opinion survey is conducted regularly in a number of African countries undergoing a political transition to democracy. Madagascar underwent a second survey in 2008. The present study provides an overview of the initial findings of the survey conducted in May 2008, which studied Madagascans' attitudes towards the state of their national economy and government performance. Wherever possible, it compares the findings of the latest *Afrobarometer* survey with the results of the 2005 survey.

A mixed view of the national economy

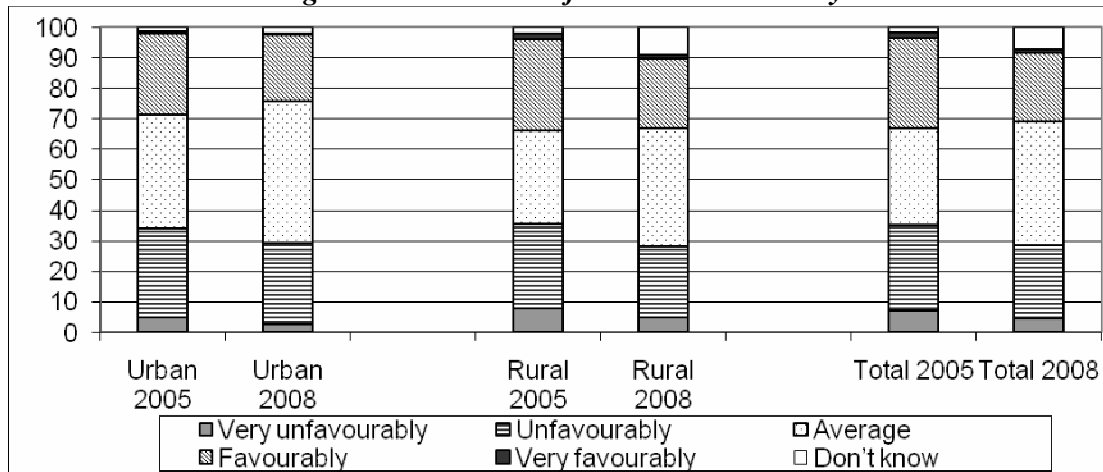
Madagascans' opinion of the current state of their economy is distinctly mixed (see figure 1). 24% of Madagascans rate their economy favourably or very favourably, 28% rate it unfavourably or very unfavourably, and 41% rate it neither favourably nor unfavourably. In 2005, the same opinions were held respectively by 35%, 31% and 32% of the total population. On the whole, attitudes towards the current state of the economy are very similar in urban and in rural areas.

However, opinions vary significantly according to respondents' (former) provinces of residence¹. People living in Toliara and Antsiranana have a more negative view of the current state of their economy than the inhabitants of other provinces. Approximately 40% of Madagascans living in these provinces rate the current state of their economy unfavourably or very unfavourably, a view shared by less than 25% of the inhabitants of Toamasina and Fianarantsoa.

On this particular point, the results of the 2008 *Afrobarometer* survey are similar to the results obtained in 2005. In 2005, Madagascans already held a mixed view of the state of their national economy, and no marked difference was observed between the views expressed by Madagascans living in rural areas and those living in urban areas. At the time, 31% of Madagascans rated the current state of their economy favourably or very favourably, 35% rated it unfavourably or very unfavourably, and 32% rated it neither favourably nor unfavourably.

However, a comparative analysis of the two sets of results shows that fewer people expressed a view, whether positive (favourably) or negative (unfavourably). The increase of the proportion of undecided respondents tends to indicate a greater degree of perplexity towards the current economic situation.

Figure 1: Evaluations of the national economy



Sources: *Afrobarometer* survey, *Coef Resources/DIAL*, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

A comparative analysis of the 2005 and 2008 results also indicates a distinct change in the distribution of views according to respondents' (former) provinces of residence. While the inhabitants of Toliara and Antsiranana held a generally negative view of the national economy in 2005, the views held by the inhabitants of Antananarivo have tended to become distinctly more radical. In 2005, the balance of opinion was positive, whereas it is currently negative (with 29% of the inhabitants rating the state of the economy unfavourably, as opposed to 21% who rate it favourably). Today, Antananarivo is the province with the third lowest balance of opinion (after Toliara and Antsiranana).

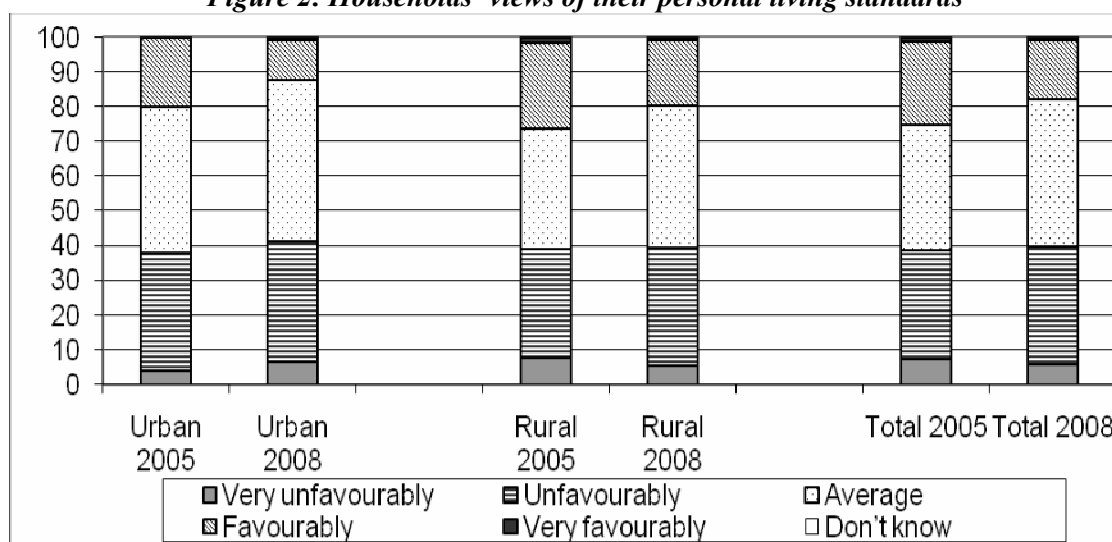
These general results need to be assessed in connection with Madagascans' views of their personal living standards (see figure 2). While 39% of Madagascans feel that their living standards are poor, as in 2005, the proportion of Madagascans who claim to be satisfied with their

¹ The size of the sample cannot provide reliable results for all 22 regions. By contrast, the survey is representative for the 6 former provinces.

living conditions has decreased, from 25% to 17%. Overall, Madagascans hold a more negative view of their living standards in 2008 than they did in 2005.

The results of the survey also vary widely from one (former) province to another. The percentage of respondents who complain about their personal living standards is very high in Toliara and Antsiranana, where respectively 61% and 45% of the local population feel dissatisfied with their current living standards. The third highest percentage of dissatisfaction is in Antananarivo, where 39% of the population rate their living standards unfavourably or very unfavourably. By contrast, just 26% of the population held the same view in 2005, at a time when the Antananarivo province had the second lowest proportion of dissatisfied inhabitants in the country.

Figure 2: Households' views of their personal living standards



Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

A significant proportion of Madagascans are faced with shortages

In order to go beyond general attitudes and gain a more accurate view of the reality of living conditions in Madagascar, households were asked about the cases of shortages with which they have been faced (in terms of basic human needs, namely: clean water, food, medicine).

The number of households that did not have access to a basic human need on a frequent basis throughout the year is high (see figures 3-7). In 2008, a significant proportion of the total population of Madagascar suffered on a recurrent basis (“many times” or “always”) from a “shortage of enough food to eat” (22%), a “shortage of clean water” (17%) and a “shortage of medicine or medical care” (22%). Generally speaking, a low proportion of Madagascans said they never lacked these basic needs. Only 35% of Madagascans said they always had enough food to eat throughout the year and 37% said they always had access to medicine or medical care.

Lack of money affects a majority of Madagascans. 83% of Madagascans claim they were faced with financial difficulties at least once throughout the year (87% of Madagascans in urban areas and 72% in rural areas)² and nearly 40% said they were faced with financial difficulties “several times”.

² The difference between people living in urban areas and those living in rural areas also points to the lesser degree of monetization in rural areas, implying lower financial needs.

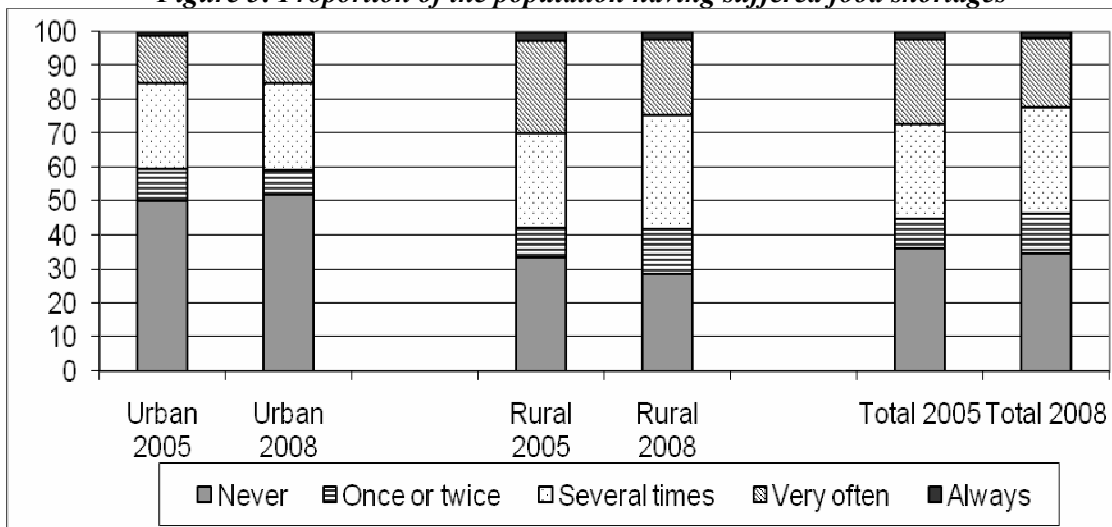
Shortages are clearly a more widespread phenomenon in rural areas. One quarter of households in rural areas claim they lacked food, medicine or medical care “always” or “several times” throughout the year and one fifth suffered a shortage of clean water. By comparison, 16% of Madagascans living in urban areas suffered a shortage of food and just 7% lacked water, medicine or medical care.

Toliara is the most underprivileged of all the (former) provinces. It has the lowest proportion of people who have never suffered such shortages. For example, just 22% of the population living in the Toliara province have never suffered food shortages, as opposed to the Antananarivo province, where twice as many people (44%) have never been faced with food shortages.

Compared with 2005, access to clean water and medicine has worsened: the proportion of dissatisfied respondents has risen respectively from 13% and 15% to 17% and 22%. The findings are particularly negative for access to health care: in 2005, nearly half the population had never suffered from inadequate access to medicine or medical care, as opposed to just 37% in 2008.

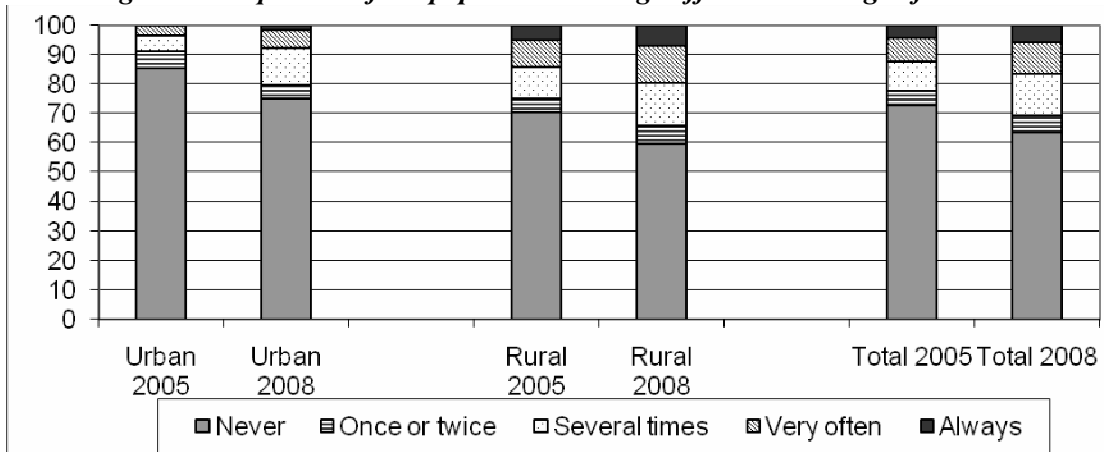
The people most affected by a decline in the quality of their living standards are those living in rural areas: 72% of people in rural areas suffered a food shortage at least once in 2008 (as opposed to 67% in 2005); 41% suffered a shortage of clean water (30% in 2005), and 69% suffered from inadequate access to medicine (52% in 2005).

Figure 3: Proportion of the population having suffered food shortages



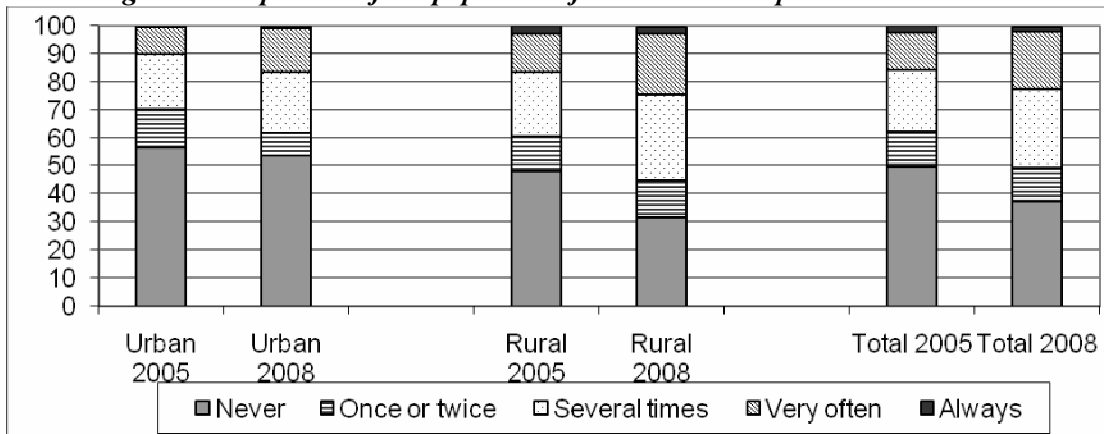
Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef-resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

Figure 4: Proportion of the population having suffered a shortage of clean water



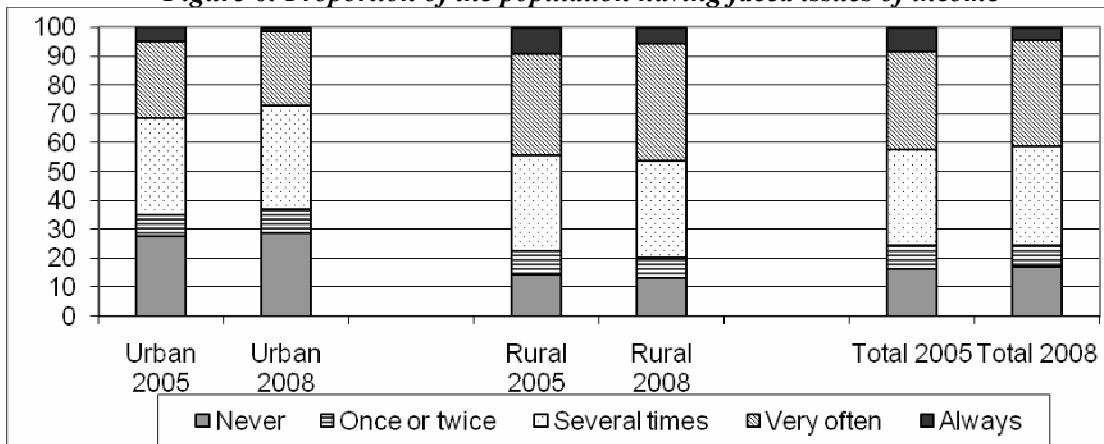
Sources: Afrobarometer survey Coef-resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

Figure 5: Proportion of the population faced with inadequate access to medicine



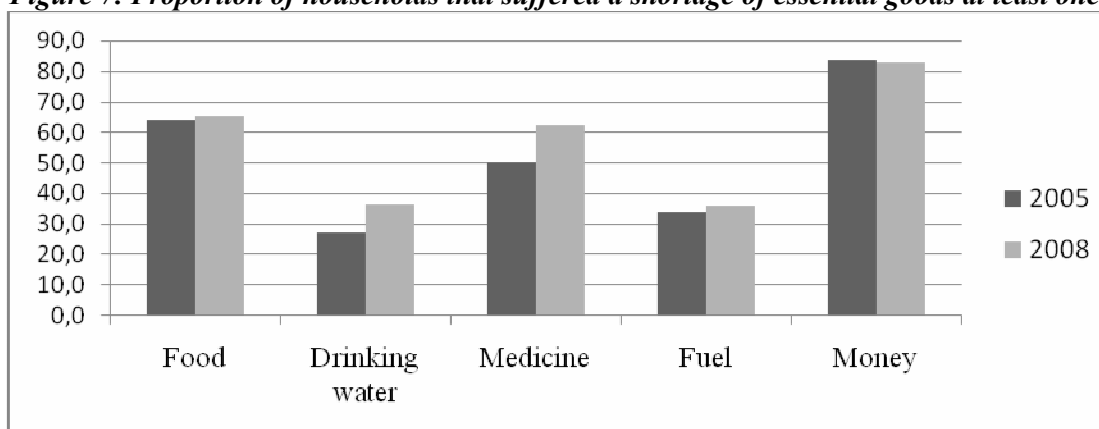
Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef-resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

Figure 6: Proportion of the population having faced issues of income



Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef-resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

Figure 7: Proportion of households that suffered a shortage of essential goods at least once



Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef-resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

Insecurity: a genuine concern for Madagascans

Physical insecurity that affects the protection of individuals and property is a form of poverty. The sense of security is a need in itself, but it also has an impact on personal living standards. Physical attacks have a direct impact on an individual's health and property, and insecurity may indirectly restrict an individual's degree of freedom in terms of mobility and investments.

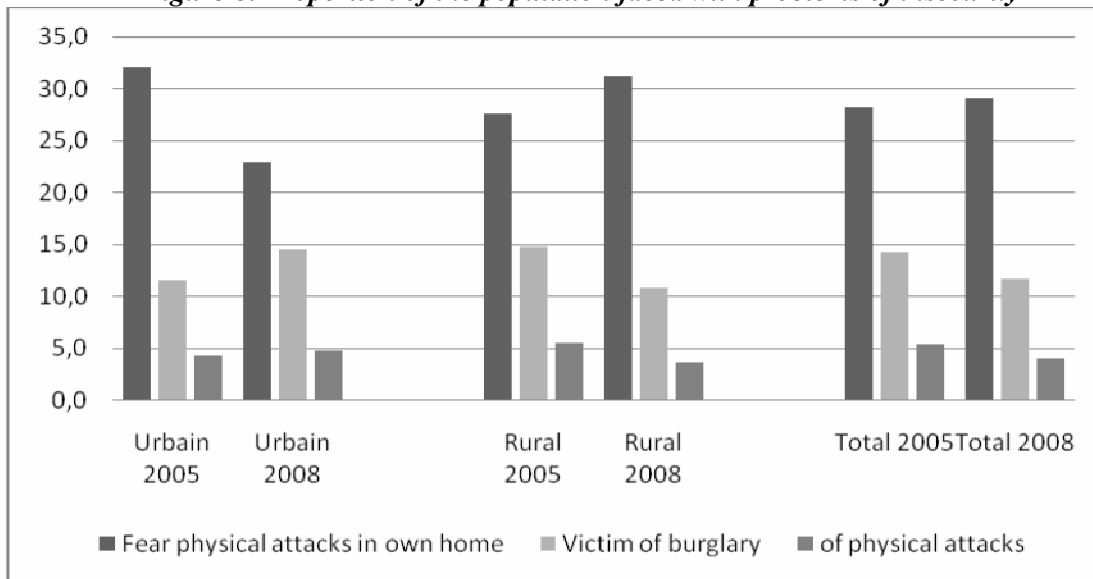
The current situation in Madagascar may be viewed as a matter of some concern (see figure 8). 29% of Madagascans fear being physically attacked in their own home; more than 1 in 10 Madagascans have had their house burgled and 4% have suffered a physical attack in the past year.

However, the breakdown of the results according to respondents' residential milieu indicates a noticeable trend. Whereas there were no marked differences between urban and rural areas in 2005, the results of the 2008 Afrobarometer survey indicate that the sense of insecurity is now more widespread in rural areas. Over 30% of people living in rural areas fear being physically attacked in their homes, as opposed to 23% of people living in urban areas.

The trends concerning changes in the feeling of insecurity between 2005 and 2008 differ according to respondents' residential milieu. In urban areas, the sense of insecurity has decreased (from 32% in 2005 to 23% in 2008), although the number of victims of physical attacks has increased (from 11% to 15%). Conversely, a relatively higher number of individuals living in rural areas claim they fear being physically attacked, although the total number of victims of attacks has in fact decreased (the percentage of victims of robbery has gone from 15% to 11%). Thus, while the measures implemented to tackle these issues have had some impact, they have not been enough to reassure those living in rural areas.

By contrast, the results obtained in each (former) province suggest that the feeling of insecurity is in accordance with the actual insecurity experienced by households, a fact that was not apparent in 2005. Toliara and Fianarantsoa are the provinces where the feeling of insecurity is most widespread: respectively 45% and 35% of Madagascans living in these provinces fear being physically attacked in their own homes. Toliara and Fianarantsoa are also the provinces where the proportion of victims of robbery and physical attacks is highest.

Figure 8: Proportion of the population faced with problems of insecurity



Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef/Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

Insecurity: the first issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority by the government

According to Madagascans, insecurity is the first issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority by the government. Asked to name the three issues that should be the government’s top priorities, more than 11% of Madagascans pointed immediately to crime and insecurity as the first issue, while 33% ranked crime and insecurity as one of the three most important priorities. These demands were expressed in equal measure by people living in urban areas (34%) and by those living in rural areas (32%; see table 1). The other most cited issues were poverty and social exclusion (29%), agricultural development (28% overall and 34% in rural areas) and issues of salary and income (27%).

Table 1: The main issues that the government needs to remedy as a matter of priority³

	2008			2005
	Urban	Rural	Total	Total
Crime and insecurity	34,3	31,8	32,5	15,9
Poverty/social exclusion	31,1	27,7	28,6	18,0
Agriculture	12,8	33,6	28,3	25,7
Salaries and income	32,3	25,0	26,9	20,1
Food insecurity	24,7	21,0	22,0	27,3
Health care	16,7	19,3	18,6	22,2
Unemployment	37,6	11,9	18,4	16,3
Infrastructures	7,2	22,1	18,3	25,5
Education	8,9	15,8	14,0	12,5
Management of the economy	22,8	8,8	12,3	15,6
Agricultural marketing	5,3	9,3	8,3	
Water	3,2	7,4	6,3	4,8
Transport	1,7	6,3	5,1	2,7
Electricity	3,5	5,3	4,8	3,3
Corruption	7,8	2,8	4,1	4,9
Drought	0,5	4,6	3,5	4,7

Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008

Another, similar question, submitted this time as an open-ended question, confirmed that poverty and insecurity were the major concerns of Madagascans. Asked about what they felt was the utmost priority among four suggestions, 58% said that the improvement of the economic conditions of poor people was the most important priority; 23% emphasized the maintenance of order; 10% insisted on the need to protect the right of citizens to live freely; and 6% said that the most urgent issue was to grant Madagascans a greater say in the decisions taken by the government.

A still pronounced though declining optimism about future prospects

Though they face a wide range of difficulties, Madagascans remain surprisingly confident about their future prospects (see table 2). While 17% of Madagascans feel that their personal living standards are unsatisfactory and 30% claim that the quality of their living standards has declined compared with the previous year, nearly 40% of Madagascans feel that the state of their country will improve and 45% make the same prediction about their living standards. Paradoxically, people living in urban areas, who take the most severe view of the current state of the national economy and are the most dissatisfied with the recent evolution of their living standards, are also those who express the highest degree of optimism. The difference between the percentage of people who feel that future economic conditions will be better and even markedly better and the percentage of people who feel they will be worse or markedly worse indicates that the balances of

³ Respondents were asked to give three answers (priorities) about the most important national issues which the government needs to address. These were open-ended questions.

opinion observed for urban areas are +34 % points for the evolution of the national economy and +40 % points for the evolution of their living standards.

However, a comparison with the 2005 results lessens the significance of these positive results, and highlights a marked decline of optimism. In 2005, the balances of opinion concerning future prospects were in the area of +50 % points for the entire population; today they stand respectively at +28 % points and +34 % points. Relatively fewer people are prepared to express a degree of confidence in the future, despite the fact that fewer individuals felt that their living standards had worsened (the balance of opinion went from -6 % points in 2005 to -1 % point in 2008) or that the state of the national economy had declined compared with the previous year (the balance of opinion went from -4 % points to +1 % point).

Table 2: The perception of the current situation and predictions for the coming year
Balance of opinion (positive-negative) in % points⁴

Balance of opinion (positive-negative)	2005			2008		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Current state of the national economy	-6,9	-3,6	-4,2	-6,8	-4,2	-4,9
Their current personal living standards	-17,8	-12,5	-13,4	-29,1	-19,9	-22,3
State of the national economy last year	5,4	-5,4	-3,7	0,0	0,6	0,5
Their personal living standards last year	-7,7	-5,4	-5,8	-2,7	0,2	-0,6
State of the national economy in a year's time	48,5	49,3	49,2	34,1	25,3	27,5
Their personal living standards in a year's time	55,5	54,8	54,9	39,8	32,4	34,3

Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

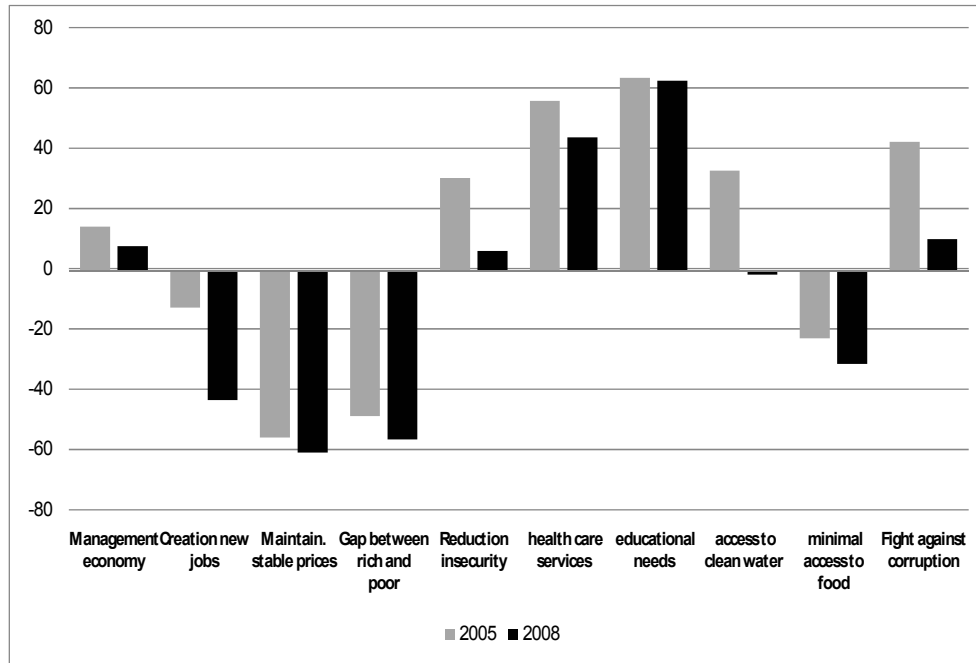
Mixed results for the government

The relative optimism of Madagascans may be a reflection of their confidence in the capacity of the government to resolve certain issues. Nonetheless, Madagascans' attitudes towards government performance are relatively contrasted (see figure 9). The measures taken by the government in the realm of social services are viewed very favourably. Madagascans tend to acknowledge the positive achievements of their government in education and health care, as well as in the fight against HIV/AIDS and the promotion of women. By contrast, as in 2005, Madagascans emphasize the government's inadequate efforts to create new jobs, to limit inflation, and to resolve issues of food shortage. Madagascans' attitudes towards government performance in these areas are even more negative in 2008, which may attest to a deterioration of the situation, or at least to a sense of disappointed expectations.

⁴ Note: the balance of opinion technique applied to qualitative questions, commonly used for analysing the economic conjuncture, which helps to classify replies in three groups (positive, neutral, negative), involves subtracting the percentage of negative replies from the percentage of positive replies. This yields an indicator in % points, varying between +100 and -100. In this case: those who approve and those who do not approve.

In fact, compared with 2005, Madagascans generally take a more critical view of the range of policies implemented by their government. In particular, they are less confident about the capacity of their government to reduce insecurity, improve access to clean water, and root out corruption.

Figure 9: Evolution of Madagascans' attitudes towards government efficiency



Sources: Afrobarometer survey, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2005 and 2008.

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