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# MADAGASCANS AND DEMOCRACY: PRINCIPLES, PRACTICE, PARTICIPATION

## Abstract

*Madagascans are clearly very keen to preserve key civil liberties: freedom of expression, the right to organize and freedom of the press. These attitudes, which were already apparent in the 2005 survey, appear to be even more strongly felt in 2008. The vast majority of Madagascans are also deeply attached to the general principles of democratic governance (against one-party rule, presidential dictatorship or 'one-man rule' and military rule).*

*Beyond the matter of principles, Madagascans are nonetheless fairly guarded about the actual practice of democratic governance in their country. While Madagascans are fairly satisfied with the respect of real civil liberties, 22% feel they are not at all or not very able to express their opinions freely. One quarter of Madagascans also claim that the specific kind of government in place is of little importance, indicating a degree of disenchantment with the political authorities. Lastly, even those Madagascans who recognize that democratic principles are effectively practised and applied also complain frequently that democracy is far from perfect. This dissatisfaction with democratic governance is mirrored by a limited degree of trust in Madagascar's political institutions. Only the President of the Republic of Madagascar still enjoys a high level of public trust, as he did in 2005. By contrast, barely one adult in two has any trust (wholly or in part) in their local council, and just 47% of Madagascans trust their National Assembly. Opposition parties remain distinctly out of favour.*

*In short, there appears to be a degree of disenchantment among Madagascans, resulting in a low level of interest in politics and limited public participation in the political life of the country. Barely 50% of Madagascans claim they met with others in the course of the past year in order to solve a local issue and less than 10% of Madagascans claim they contacted a politician to resolve a local issue. Less than 3% of Madagascans say they took part in a demonstration or protest. All of these types of political participation have declined since 2005, marking a relative retreat of Madagascans from the political life of their country.*

The Afrobarometer public opinion survey is conducted regularly in a number of African countries undergoing a political transition to democracy (20 in 2008). The present study, based on the data provided by the survey conducted in May 2008, outlines Madagascans' attitudes towards democracy – both in terms of the principles and of the practice of democracy.

## Attachment to democratic principles

> *Madagascans are very keen on key civil liberties: freedom of expression, the right to organize and freedom of the press. They are also fairly satisfied with the real freedoms they enjoy. 22% of Madagascans claim nonetheless that they are at all or not very able to express their opinions freely.*

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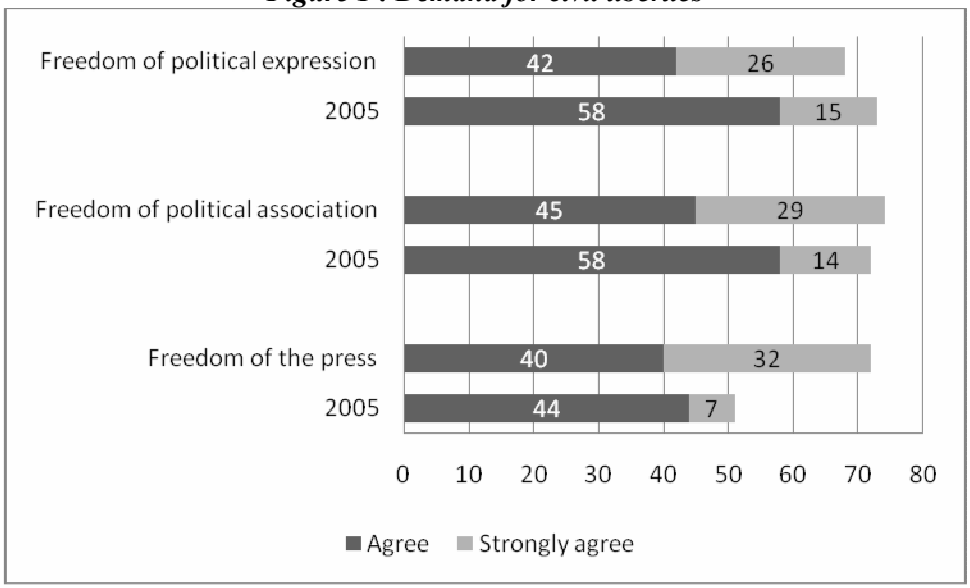
Democratic governance requires that a number of basic civil liberties be respected, such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press and the right to organize. When asked about these civil liberties, Madagascans appear to be strongly in favour of their effective application. 72% of Madagascan adults claim they agree fully or in part that the news media should be free to publish any story they see fit, without fear of being shut down. 74% of Madagascans feel that individuals should feel free to join any organization they wish, whether the government approves or not. 68% of Madagascans claim that people should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence[i]. Conversely, less than 15% of Madagascans are prepared to accept a restriction of civil liberties.

Compared with 2005, the demand for civil liberties is on the increase (i.e. a greater number of Madagascans are in favour of civil liberties) and is systematically asserted more firmly (a greater number of Madagascans claim they fully support unconditional freedom). This is particularly apparent in the case of freedom of the press, viewed favourably by 72% of Madagascans in 2008 as opposed to just 51% in 2005, and very favourably by 32% of Madagascans (as opposed to just 7% in 2005).

***Figure 1 : Demand for civil liberties***




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

As well as being strongly attached to fundamental civil liberties, Madagascans are fairly satisfied with the real liberties they enjoy. 68% of Madagascans feel that freedom of expression is effectively practised and applied, 66% believe that the right to organize is effectively practised and applied, and 86% feel that they are free to choose the candidate for whom they wish to vote.

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***Figure 2 : Supply of civil liberties***

*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

Nonetheless, there remains a significant core of Madagascans (22%) who claim that they are not at all or not very able to express their opinions freely. The higher the educational level of respondents, the more widespread this unfavourable attitude toward effective freedom of expression tends to be. 37% of Madagascans with higher education qualifications feel that the principle of freedom of expression is not applied, as opposed to just 9% of Madagascans without any formal qualifications.

These attitudes towards freedom of expression are reflected in some of the answers to the following question included in the survey: '*In this country, how often do people need to be careful about what they say about politics?*'. In 2005, 39% of Madagascans answered 'never' or 'rarely', as opposed to just 29% in 2008, indicating a perceived deterioration of freedom of expression.

***Table 1: In this country, how often do people need to be careful about what they say about politics?***

| | Never | Rarely | Often | Always | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2005 survey | 8 | 31 | 20 | 30 | 10 |
| 2008 survey | 7 | 22 | 23 | 29 | 19 |

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

> *Most Madagascans are also keen on the general principles of democratic governance. However, one quarter of Madagascans claim that the kind of government in place is of little importance for someone like them, indicating a degree of disenchantment with political power.*

When asked about their preferences concerning political governance, nearly three quarters of Madagascans reject the idea of one-party rule. The same proportion of Madagascans reject presidential dictatorship or 'one-man rule'. 63% of Madagascans reject the idea that the army should be able to step in to rule the country. When respondents do not state these preferences, it is more often because they have no definite views about the issue rather than the fact that they hold the opposite view. Madagascans' attachment to the general principles of democratic rule is

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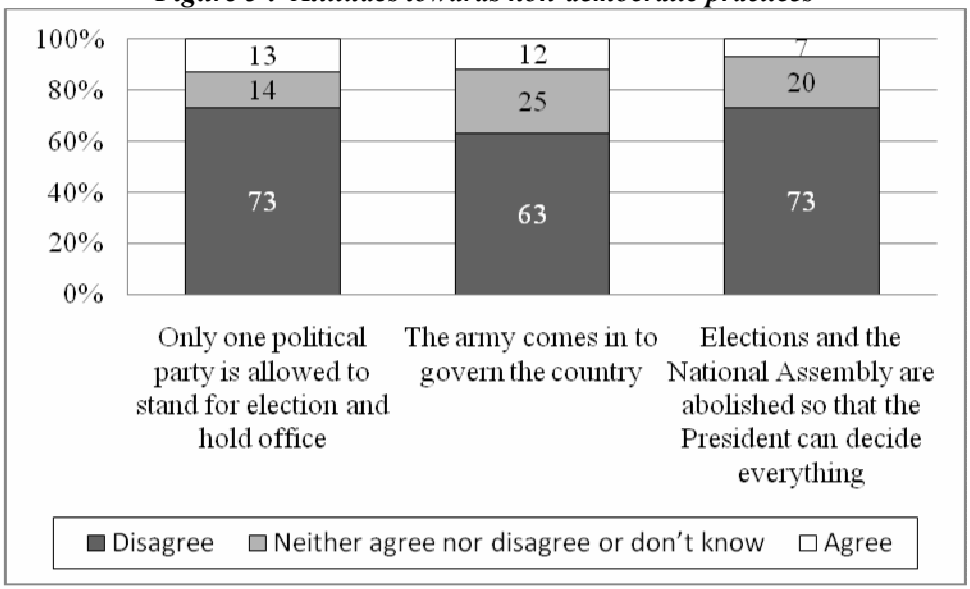
therefore strong. Compared with 2005, their attachment has not lessened, since the distribution of answers has remained more or less unchanged.

***Figure 3 : Attitudes towards non-democratic practices***




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

Surprisingly, just 36% of Madagascans state that democracy is preferable to any other form of governance, a proportion that has decreased since 2005, when 43% of Madagascans held the same view. However, this is not indicative of a widespread rejection of democracy, since just 5% of Madagascans argue that in some circumstances a non-democratic government can be preferable, a result that is comparable to the findings of the 2005 survey.

These findings are partly the product of a question that requires some understanding of the nature of democratic rule. Overall, 32% of Madagascans chose not to answer the question, including 68% of Madagascans with no education. Note that a firm preference for democratic rule increases in line with respondents' level of education.

In 2005, just 18% of Madagascans said they did not know. The increase of the number of non-respondents is indicative of a degree of disenchantment with democracy and with politics more generally. This sense of disenchantment is also expressed more clearly in the choice made by 26% of Madagascans, who hold the view that '*For someone like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have*', indicating they have no expectations from the state.

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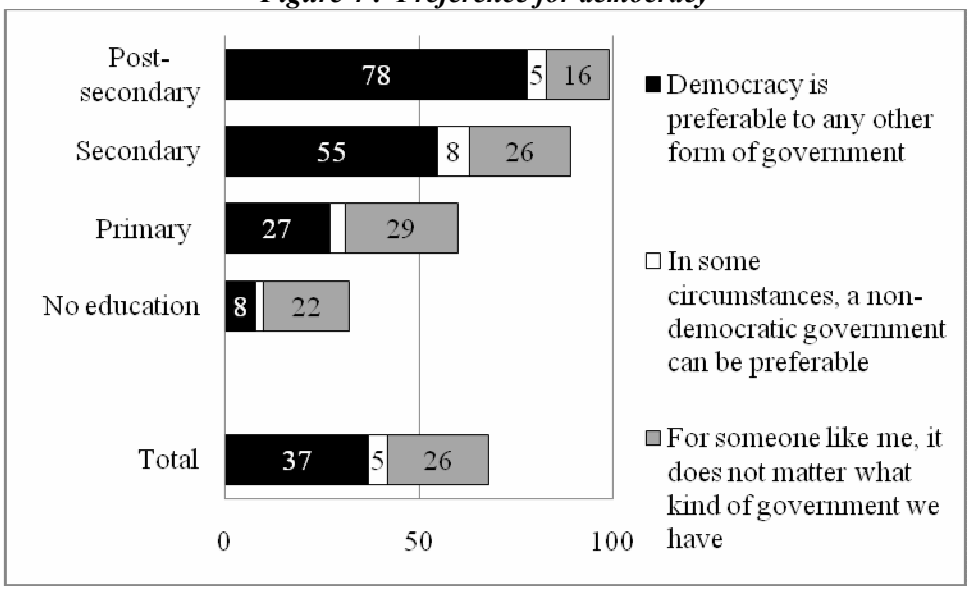
*Figure 4 : Preference for democracy*




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*
*Note: Some bars do not go up to 100, indicating the proportion of non-respondents.*

**Democratic rule and political institutions**

> *Nearly 50% of Madagascans have no view about the extent of democratic governance in their country. However, most of the remaining respondents acknowledge that their country is a democracy, though they also frequently claim that there are problems with the practice of democratic governance in their country. Just 14% claim to be fairly or very satisfied with the practice of democratic governance in their country.*

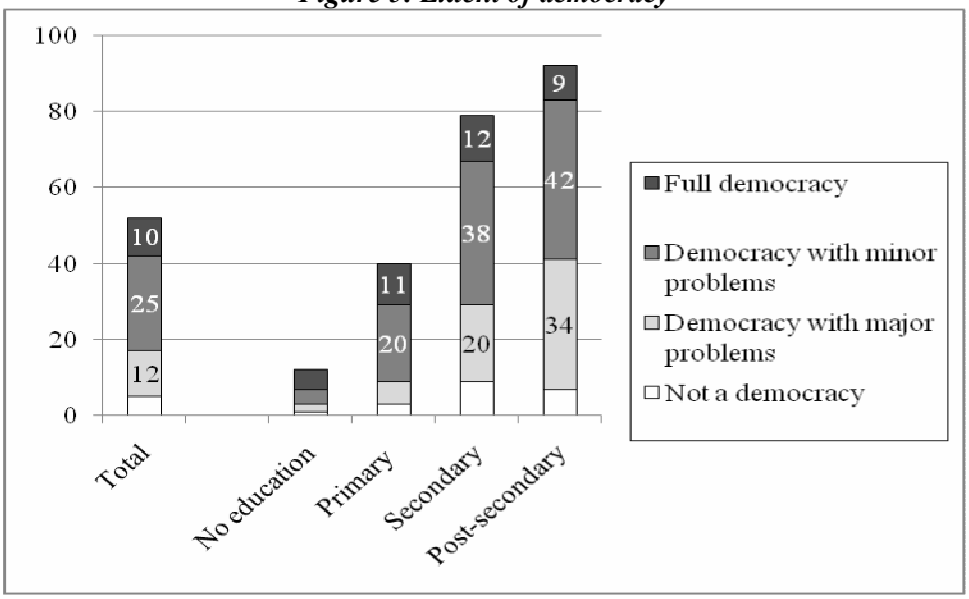
When asked about the extent of democratic rule in their country, 48% of Madagascan adults expressed no views, either because they claimed not to understand the question (26%) or because they said they did not know (22%). Unsurprisingly, it can be noted that the frequency of answers to this question, which requires a certain level of technical competence, is closely connected with respondents' level of education: 93% of respondents with higher education qualifications answered the question, as opposed to just 13% of respondents with no education.

Of those respondents who felt able to answer the question, a vast majority stated that their country was a democracy. Yet the consensus about the nature of Madagascar's political regime ought not to conceal the wide range of views concerning the degree of democratic rule effectively practised in the country. 23% of respondents held the view that Madagascar is a democracy with a number of major problems; 48% held the view that Madagascar is a democracy with minor problems; and just 19% felt it is a full democracy. Once again, the views held about the level of democratic rule tend to be more critical among respondents with higher education qualifications. Among respondents with higher education qualifications, 37% stated that Madagascar is a democracy with major problems (as opposed to 17% of respondents with no education) and just 10% claimed their country is a full democracy (as opposed to 42% of respondents with no education).

These responses to the extent of democratic rule in Madagascar indicate that for a majority of Madagascans, there is still some work to be done before their country becomes a full democracy. Compared with 2005, there is a distinct increase in the level of scepticism about the extent of

democratic rule. While a proportion of Madagascans (17%) state that Madagascar is not a democracy or is a democracy with major problems, the proportion of respondents who think that Madagascar is a full democracy has decreased from 25% to 10%.

***Figure 5: Extent of democracy***




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*
*Note: Some bars do not go up to 100, indicating the proportion of non-respondents.*

Similar responses are reflected in the varying degrees of satisfaction with the effective practice of democratic governance. Of the 55% of respondents who answered this question, less than a third claimed they were fairly or very satisfied with the way in which the rule of democracy was effectively practised, over 40% said they were not very satisfied, and a third expressed complete dissatisfaction. Once again, the degree of dissatisfaction increases in line with respondents' level of education.

Compared with 2005, there are similar changes in the responses concerning the level of democratic rule. While those respondents who clearly state their dissatisfaction still make up a small minority of the total number of respondents, those who claim they are fairly or very satisfied account for just 14% of respondents, as opposed to 26% in 2005.

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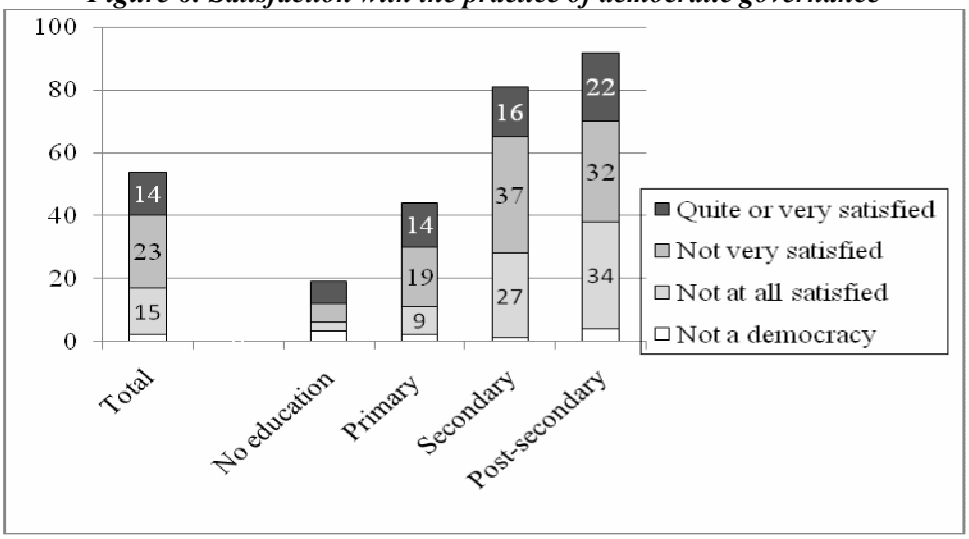
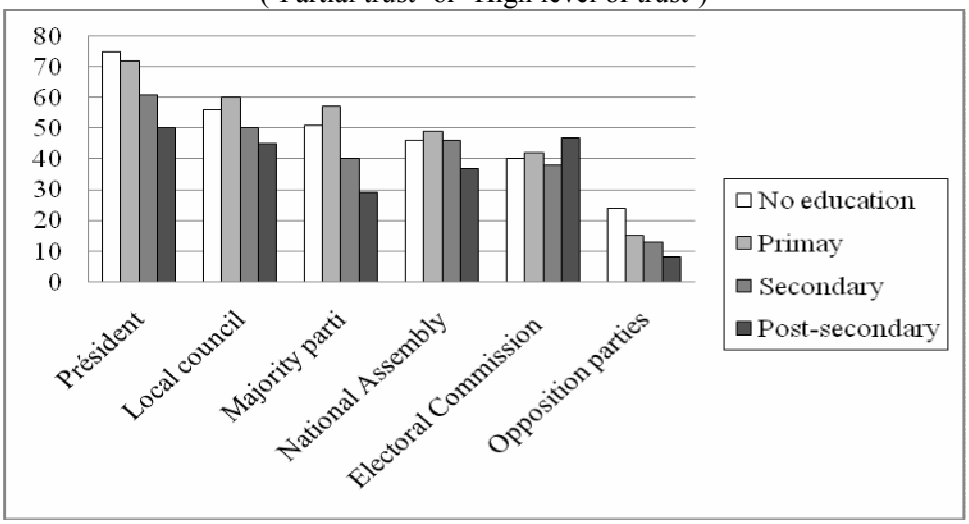
***Figure 6: Satisfaction with the practice of democratic governance***




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

*Dissatisfaction with the practice of democratic governance is paralleled by a limited degree of public confidence in political institutions. Only the President still inspires a high level of public trust, as he did in 2005. By contrast, over 50% of adults express partial or full confidence in their local council and 47% express partial or full confidence in the National Assembly. Opposition parties appear to be distinctly out of favour.*

***Figure 7: Public trust in political institutions***
('Partial trust' or 'High level of trust')




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

A high number of Madagascans view their President as trustworthy: 68% of Madagascans and 72% of respondents stated they trusted him fully or in part. As in 2005, the President is by far the political institution that drew the highest number of responses (94% expressed a view) and enjoys the highest degree of public trust. Compared with 2005, the President's 'popularity ratings' have remained more or less unchanged. However, public trust in the president tends to decrease in line with respondents' level of education. Three quarters of respondents with no education express their trust in the president, as opposed to just 50% of respondents with a higher education

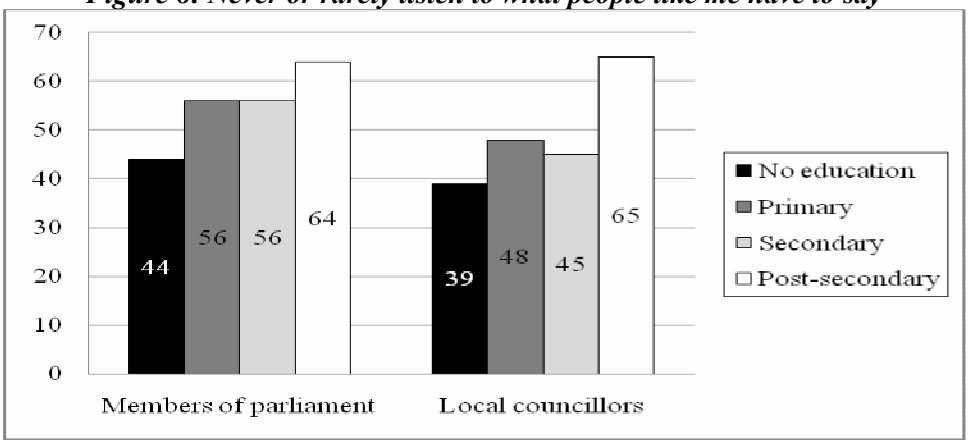
qualification. It is also noteworthy that there is a greater degree of public trust in the President than in the political party which he leads. Less than 50% of Madagascans claim they trust at least in part the political party currently in power.

The other political institutions inspire more qualified responses: barely 50% of Madagascan adults claim they trust at least in part their local council, and 47% claim they trust at least in part their National Assembly. These results are comparable to the findings of the 2005 survey.

When asked about the efforts made by the people working in these institutions, just 18% of Madagascans claimed that members of parliament often or always do their best to listen to what the people have to say, while 32% of Madagascans claimed that local councillors often or always do their best to listen to what the people have to say. These findings are indicative of a wide gap between citizens and the state. In the case of members of parliament, nearly 60% of Madagascans living on the Grande Ile do not know the name of their elected representative in parliament. When asked about how often their elected representative visits their constituency, just 22% of Madagascans said they thought they come at least once a month, while 37% said they never did.

As in 2005, opposition parties are still distinctly out of favour since 46% of Madagascans say they have no trust at all in them, while 33% say they have only a small degree of trust in them. This high degree of public distrust implies a rejection of multiparty competition. While a vast majority of Madagascans tend to reject the idea of one-party rule, more than one in three Madagascans believe that political parties tend to create division and confusion and that there is therefore no need for several parties.

***Figure 8: Never or rarely listen to what people like me have to say***




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

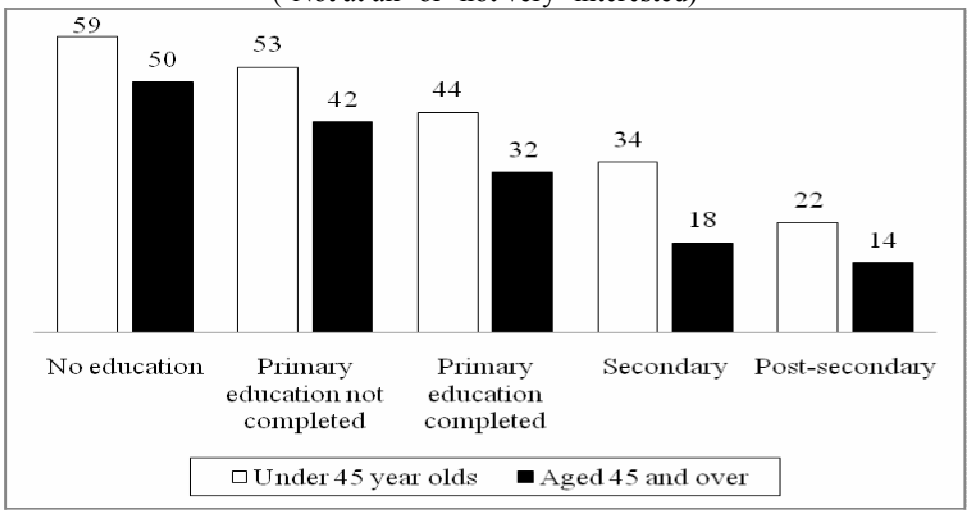
**Political participation in Madagascar**

In 2005, compared with the other countries included in the Afrobarometer survey, Madagascans appeared to show very little interest in the political life of their country. In 2008, even though a greater number of Madagascans claimed they are very or fairly interested in the political life of their country (58% as opposed to 49%), the rate of expression of interest remains relatively low. As in 2005, nearly 50% of Madagascans never discuss politics with their friends or family.

A low level of interest is partly the result of a generally low level of education. Just 37% of Madagascan adults have been in secondary education. Interest and participation in politics increase significantly in line with respondents' level of education. Nearly 80% of Madagascans with no education claim they have never discussed politics with their or family, as opposed to just

20% of Madagascans with higher education qualifications. Nevertheless, lack of interest in politics is also connected with age – a much greater cause for concern. Irrespective of their level of education, Madagascans under the age of 45 systematically express a more pronounced lack of interest in politics than Madagascans aged 45 and over.

***Figure 9: Lack of interest in politics***
('Not at all' or 'not very' interested)




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

The low level of interest in politics is reflected by a relatively limited public participation in politics, of whatever kind.

> *The level of declared abstention increases in line with respondents' level of qualification and decreases with age. Though it is indicative of a general lack of interest in elections, abstention is more commonly a form of political protest among the most highly qualified Madagascans.*

In a democracy, the primary kind of public participation is electoral participation. The Afrobarometer survey asked adults about their participation in the regional elections of March 16 2008. There appears to be very little correlation between the answers given by respondents and the actual reality of electoral participation. The official results of the elections indicate that the rate of participation was just 53%.[ii] Yet the 2008 survey indicates that the rate of participation was 74%. These kinds of surveys invariably reveal gaps between declared participation and actual participation. Very often the gap is indicative of the extent to which individuals are attached to republican values and the degree to which voting is viewed as a duty of citizenship. In this case, individuals therefore hesitate before stating that they did not vote. But the gap between declared participation and actual participation can also be interpreted as indicating a degree of caution exercised in surveys towards the possible uses of respondents' answers. In a context where just one candidate (TIM) was running for office in 69% of the total number of constituencies, the decision not to vote could easily be interpreted as an indication of public distrust.

The frequency of statements of abstention in surveys depends on a range of socio-demographic characteristics. 'Acknowledged' abstention is more likely in urban areas than in rural areas (32% as opposed to 24%), and is more likely among women than among men (31% as opposed to 20%). The rates of 'declared' abstention increase significantly in line with respondents' level of education (especially in towns); the lower the age of respondents, the higher the rate of 'declared'

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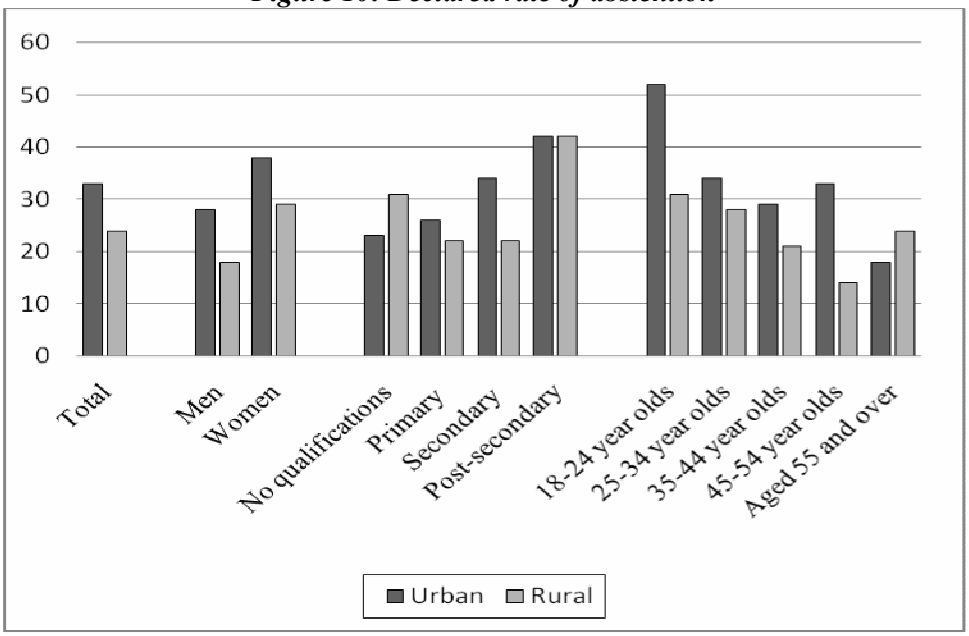
abstention. 42% of respondents with higher education qualifications stated that they abstained, as did over 50% of 18-24 year olds in urban areas.

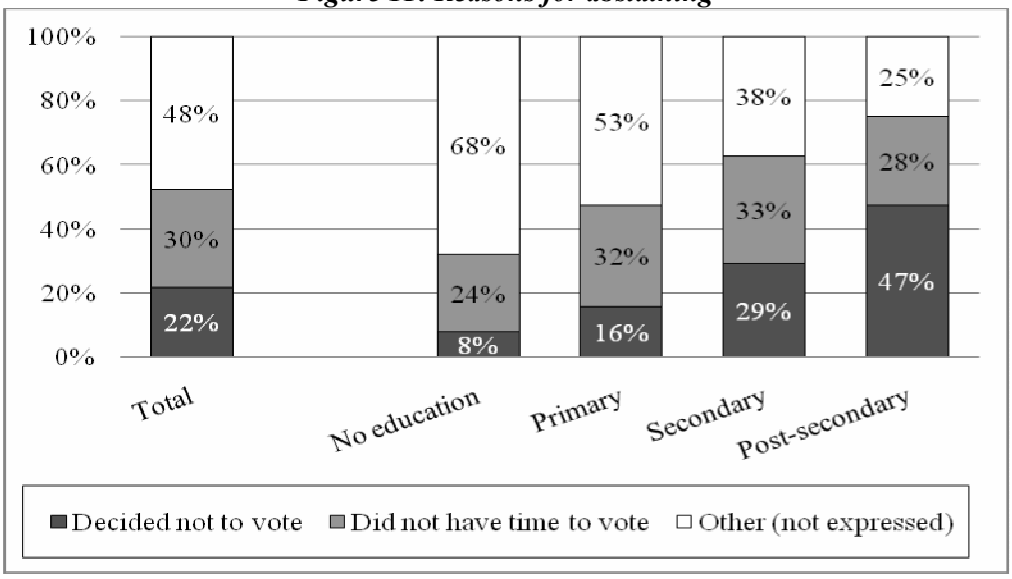
***Figure 10: Declared rate of abstention***




*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

Nearly 50% of abstainers chose not to specify their reason for not voting, and just 22% of respondents stated that their abstention was a deliberate choice, i.e. a form of political expression. It appears therefore that abstention is more often an expression of lack of interest in the election rather than a form of political protest. Nonetheless, the proportion of voters who abstained as a matter of deliberate choice significantly increases in line with abstainers' level of education. 48% of abstainers with higher education qualifications accounted for their abstention as a refusal to vote, as opposed to just 8% of respondents with no education.

***Figure 11: Reasons for abstaining***



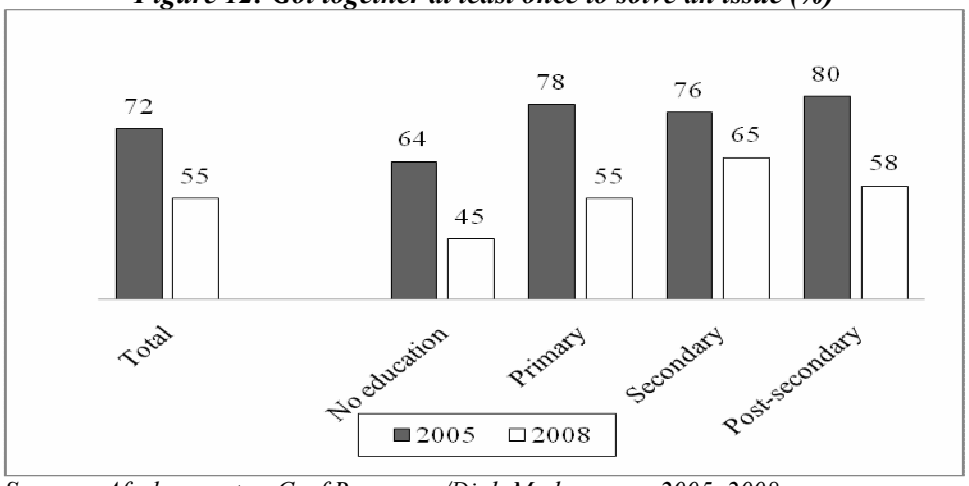

*Source: Afrobarometer, Coef Resources/Dial, Madagascar, 2008.*

*Other kinds of political participation are rarely observed. Barely more than 50% of Madagascans claimed they met with others to address an issue in the past year, and less than 10% contacted a politician. Finally, less than 3% of Madagascans admit they took part in a demonstration or protest march. All of these types of political participation have declined since 2005, suggesting a relative withdrawal of Madagascans from the political life of their country.*

In a democracy, political participation cannot be reduced to electoral participation, since democratic rule also implies that citizens may be involved in political decision-making, especially at a local level. For instance, citizens may take part in community meetings, attempt to influence decisions by congregating with others, or become a member of a political party or organization. They may also resort to less conventional types of participation in the form of protests, such as signing petitions or taking part in public demonstrations.

Although just 20% of Madagascans claim to be members of a community group, only 8% have never taken part in a community meeting. 50% of Madagascans have taken part in a community meeting several times or on a regular basis. These findings are indicative of the importance that Madagascans give to these kinds of sociability, yet they also reveal their low degree of formalization.

***Figure 12: Got together at least once to solve an issue (%)***




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

While group meetings may be the sign of a highly integrated local community, it appears that their primary purpose is not the resolution of local issues. While over 90% of Madagascans have taken part in community meetings at least once, 45% say they have never met others to address a specific issue, either out of principle or because the opportunity never arose. These results are significantly lower than in 2005, which indicates either a decline of the political dimension of community meetings or that declared participation is lower than actual participation in 2008. In 2005, though the level of participation in these meetings was just as high as in 2008, only 27% of Madagascans claimed they had never met to address a specific issue.

Apart from participation in local community meetings, the level of political involvement of whatever kind is generally low. Very few Madagascans contacted a political representative in the course of the year preceding the survey, whether to submit an issue or to convey an opinion. Just 9% of Madagascans contacted a local councillor, 3% contacted a member of parliament, and 1%

contacted a member of government. Overall, the gap between professional politicians and members of civil society therefore appears to be fairly wide.

Lastly, participation in protests is also very rare. For a significant proportion of Madagascans, protests remain taboo, since 70% of Madagascans claim they would never resort to this form of participation. In 2008, just 3% of Madagascans admitted they had personally taken part in a demonstration or protest march in the course of the past 12 months, which is four times less than in 2005.

**Conclusion**

Madagascans are very keen on democratic values and principles. While they had already been expressed in 2005, these attitudes appear to be even more strongly felt in 2008. However, Madagascans are often dissatisfied with the effective practice of democratic governance and generally express a limited degree of trust in the main political institutions of their country. In short, there is a degree of disenchantment with politics, causing some Madagascans to withdraw from political life altogether.

**This Briefing Paper was prepared by Mireille Razafindrakoto (DIAL), Désiré Razafindrazaka (COEF Ressources) and Jean-Michel Wachsberger (DIAL)**

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[i] The questions used in the survey invariably offered a choice between two options and respondents were required to indicate their (complete or partial) agreement with either one of two options, or their disagreement with both. The options were: 'We should feel free to join any organization, whether the government approves or not' versus 'The government should ban every organization that opposes its policies'; 'People should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence, no matter how unpopular their views may be' versus 'The government should not allow the expression of political views that are fundamentally different from the views of the majority'; 'The news media should be free to publish any story they see fit, without fear of being shut down' versus 'The government should be able to shut down newspapers that print stories the government does not like'.

[ii] Source: Interior Ministry

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