

Note to Madagascar's election winner: Crime, infrastructure, and food insecurity most important issues for government to fix

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 255 | Thomas Isbell

Summary

Earlier this year, political tensions in Madagascar threatened to boil over when President Rajoanarimampianina tried to push through election reforms that opposition candidates said in effect blocked them from running (Trevor, 2018; Rabary, 2018; Bozzini, 2018; Manaleng, 2018)). Thousands protested against the change, at least two demonstrators were killed, the Constitutional Court stepped in, and a "consensus government" scrapped significant sections of the controversial proposal and announced elections for November and December of this year (Economist, 2018; News24, 2018; AfricaNews, 2018).

As frontrunners among the 36 presidential candidates – a virtual who's who of the country's recent political history – prepared for an expected runoff election in December, which issues are ordinary Malagasy likely to emphasize in their election decisions, and which policy areas will they expect the new government to prioritize?

Findings from the latest Afrobarometer survey show that crime/safety is the most important issue that Malagasy want their government to address. Popular assessments of the government's performance on reducing crime have declined sharply over the past decade, and many citizens feel less safe than in the past.

Citizens also prioritize infrastructure/roads, food security, unemployment, and the economy – all areas in which government performance receives overwhelmingly poor marks.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 survey findings are being released in 2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Madagascar, led by the COEF Ressources, interviewed 1,200 adult Malagasy in January-February 2018. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Madagascar in 2005, 2008, 2013, and 2014.

Key findings

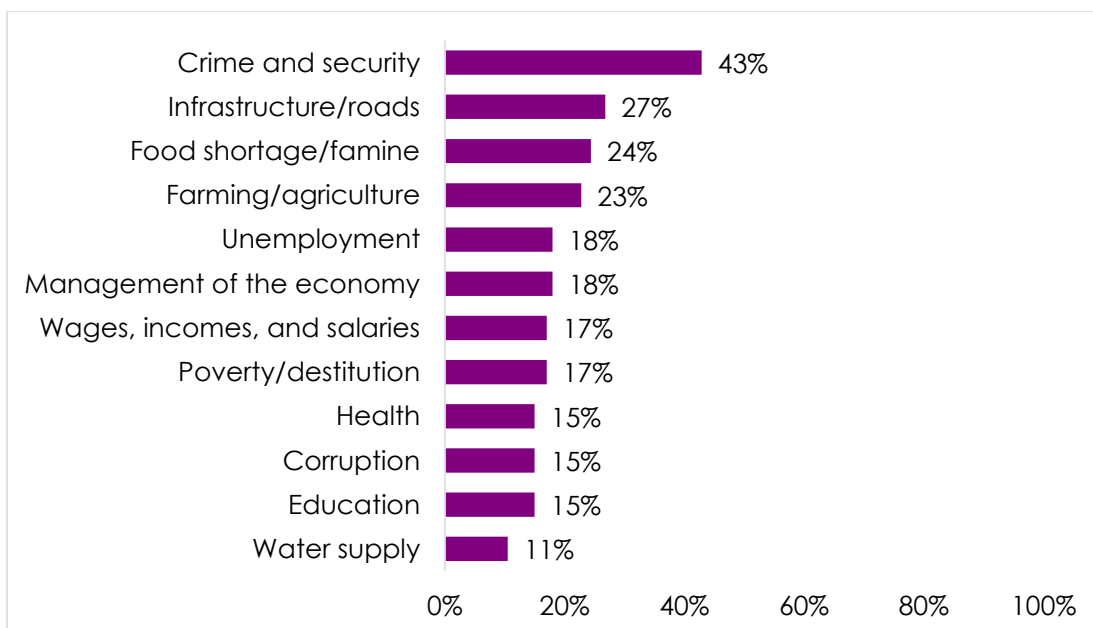
- Crime and security top the list of important problems that Malagasy want the government to address, cited by 43% of respondents as one of their top three priorities. About one in four rank infrastructure/roads (27%), food shortages (24%), and agriculture (23%) among the nation's most important problems.

- Compared to 2014, management of the economy and food shortages have increased most sharply in popular prioritization of problems that must be addressed.
- Over the past decade, citizens' assessments of the government's performance on reducing crime have worsened considerably. Three-fourths (76%) of Malagasy now say the government is doing "fairly badly" or "very badly" on crime reduction, compared to 42% in 2008.
- Four out of 10 Malagasy (40%) say their personal safety has become "worse" or "much worse" over the past few years, especially in urban areas (47%) and among the poor (47%).
- Almost nine out of 10 citizens (88%) say the government is doing a poor job of ensuring that everyone has enough to eat. Six out of 10 (61%) say they or someone in their family went without enough food at least "several times" during the past year, and among the poorest respondents, more than nine out of 10 (94%) report having experienced food shortages.
- Large majorities are critical of the government's performance on job creation (87%) and managing the economy (81%). Two-thirds (68%) describe the country's economic condition as "fairly bad" or "very bad," and only one in five (22%) expect things to improve in the coming year.

The most important problems that government should address

When asked what they consider the most important problems that the government should address, Malagasy most frequently focus on crime and security, cited by 43% of respondents as one of their top three priorities. About one in four mention infrastructure/roads (27%), food shortage/famine (24%), and agriculture (23%), while unemployment and management of the economy follow with 18% each (Figure 1). Food shortage and unemployment can of course be seen as dimensions of poverty, which 17% of respondents also name directly.

Figure 1: Most important problems that government should address (top 12)
 | Madagascar | 2018

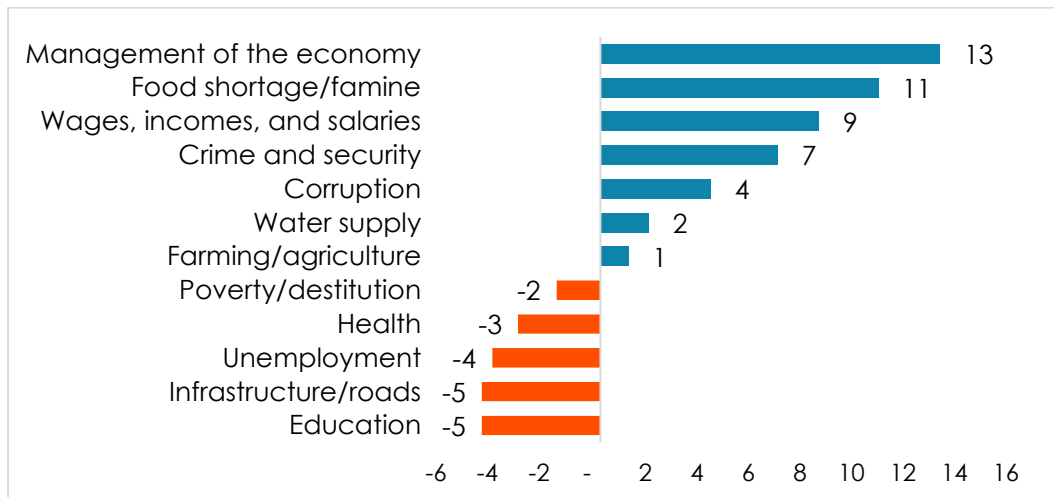


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem among their three priorities.)*

Compared to the 2014 Afrobarometer survey, the issues that have increased most strongly as perceived problems to be tackled are management of the economy (+13 percentage points) and food shortages/famine (+11 points) (Figure 2). Wages, incomes, and salaries (+9 points) and crime and security (+7 points) have also risen in importance.

Conversely, education (-5 percentage points), infrastructure (-5 points), and unemployment (-4 percentage points) have declined somewhat in priority among ordinary Malagasy.

Figure 2: Change in 12 most important problem that government should address (percentage points) | Madagascar | 2014-2018

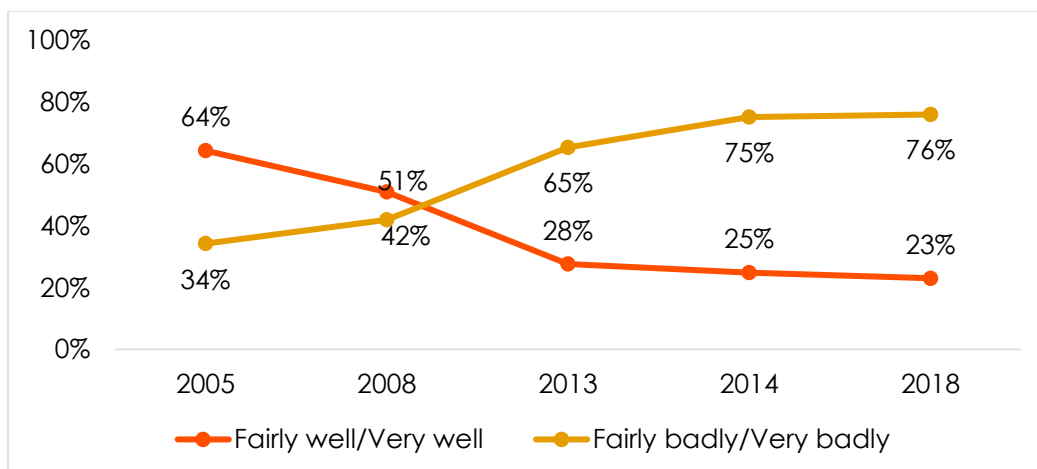


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Figure shows percentage-point change, between 2014 and 2018, in the proportion of respondents who cite each problem among their top three priorities.)

Problem No. 1: Crime and security

Besides being the most important problem that citizens want the government to address, crime and security is an area where most Malagasy think the government has been doing a poor job. Three-fourths (76%) of respondents say the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” on this issue, up from 65% in 2013 and from just 34% in 2005 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Government performance on reducing crime | Madagascar | 2005-2018

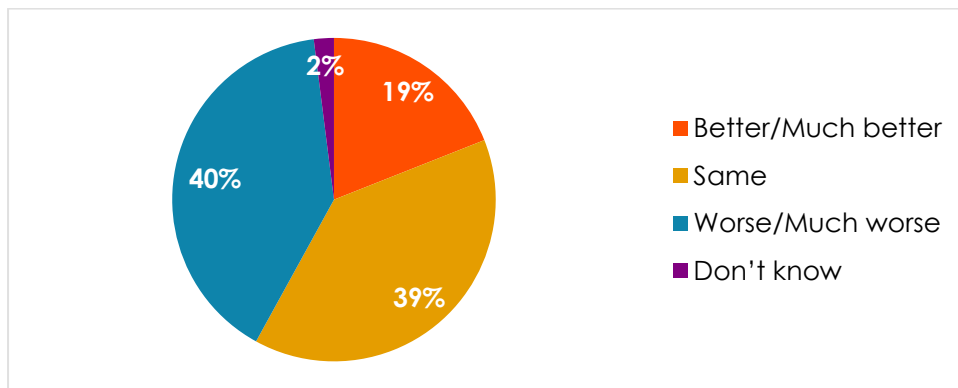


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing crime?

When asked to compare their personal safety now to a few years ago, 40% say it has become “worse” or “much worse,” while 39% say nothing has changed. Only one in five (19%) feel that their personal safety has improved in recent years (Figure 4).

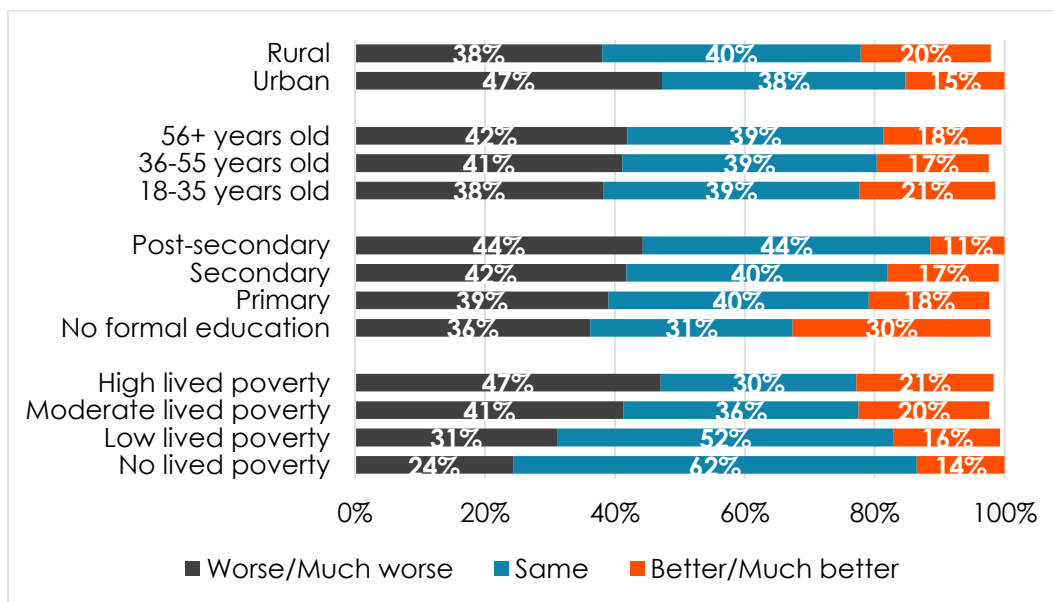
The sense that personal security has deteriorated is more common among urban residents (47%), the most educated (44% among those with post-secondary qualifications), and the poorest (47% among those with high “lived poverty”¹) (Figure 5). Malagasy with no formal education are most likely to report improvements (30%), although even in this group negative assessments (36%) are more common than positive ones.

Figure 4: Better or worse: personal safety | Madagascar | 2018



Respondents were asked: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your personal safety from crime and violence?

Figure 5: Better or worse: personal safety | by socio-demographic group | Madagascar | 2018

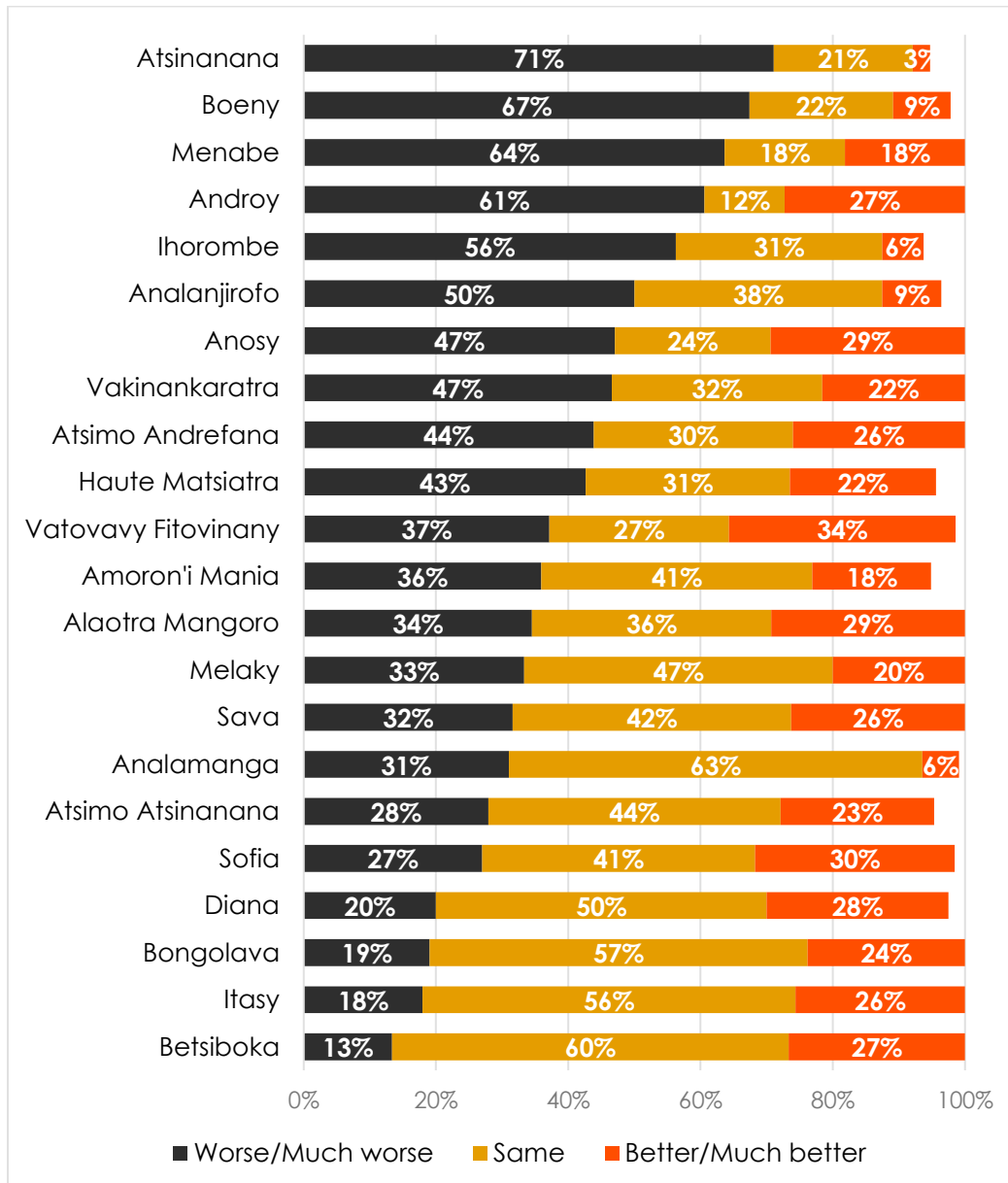


Respondents were asked: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your personal safety from crime and violence?

¹ Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following questions: “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?”

While survey sample sizes in many regions are too small to provide reliable numerical results, a breakdown suggests that deteriorating personal safety may be more of a concern to residents in Atsinanana, Boeny, Menabe, and Androy regions than to their counterparts in Betsiboka, Itasy, and Bongolava (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Better or worse: personal safety | by region | Madagascar | 2018

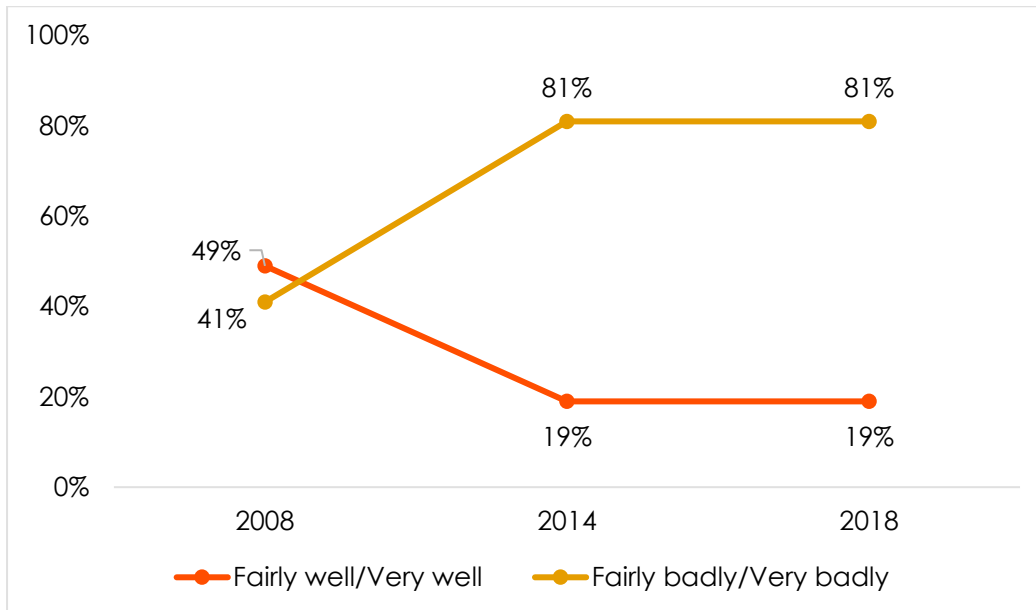


Respondents were asked: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your personal safety from crime and violence?

Problem No. 2: Infrastructure/roads

More than one in four Malagasy (27%) cite infrastructure and roads among the nation's most important problems. Over the past decade, evaluations of how government is handling maintenance of roads and bridges have worsened dramatically. While half (49%) of Malagasy said the government was doing "fairly well" or "very well" in this area in 2008, only 19% say so in 2018 (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Government performance on maintaining roads and bridges
 | Madagascar | 2008-2018

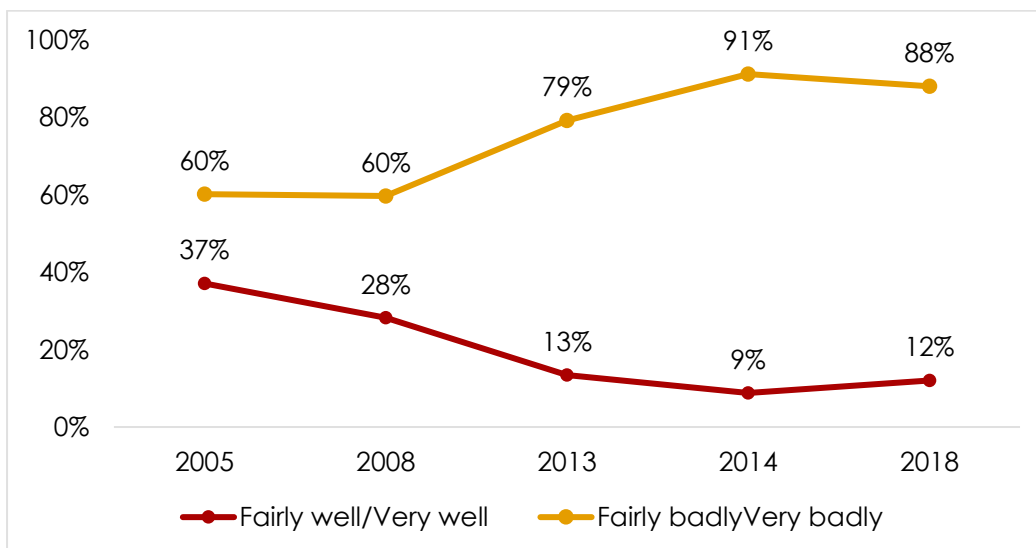


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Maintaining roads and bridges?

Problem No. 3: Food shortages

Over the past decade and a half, evaluations of how the Malagasy government has handled ensuring that its people have enough to eat have become increasingly negative. While six in 10 said that the government was doing "fairly badly" or "very badly" on food security in 2005, the share of Malagasy who offer this assessment has risen to around nine in 10 in 2014 (91%) and 2018 (88%). Only about one in 10 respondents give positive evaluations of government performance on food security in the past two survey rounds (Figure 8).

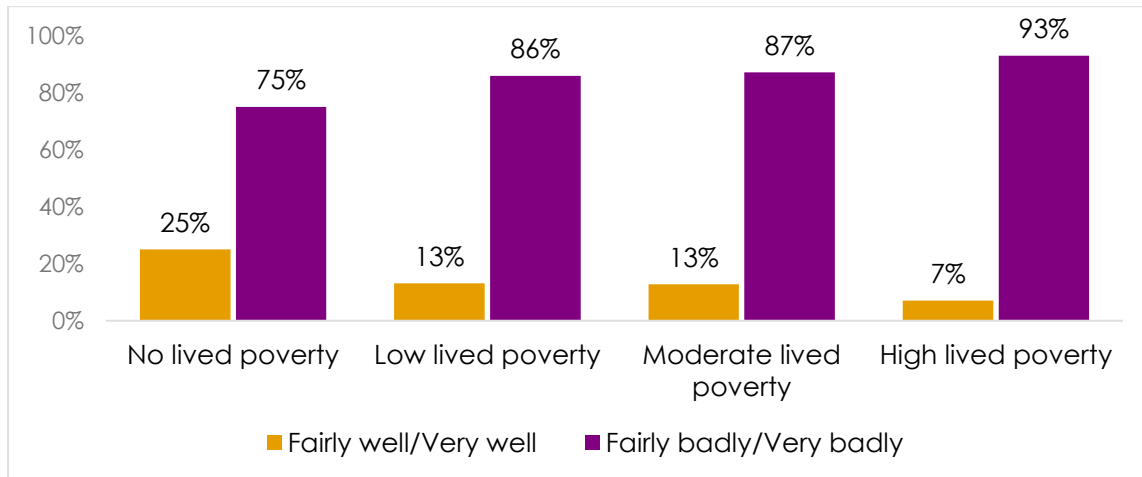
Figure 8: Government performance on food security | Madagascar | 2005-2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat?

Negative assessments are even more common among the poorest respondents. While 75% of the wealthiest Malagasy (those who experience no lived poverty) say the government is doing badly in ensuring that everyone has enough to eat, 93% of citizens with high lived poverty levels share this view (Figure 9). Evaluations do not differ significantly by urban-rural location, gender, or education level.

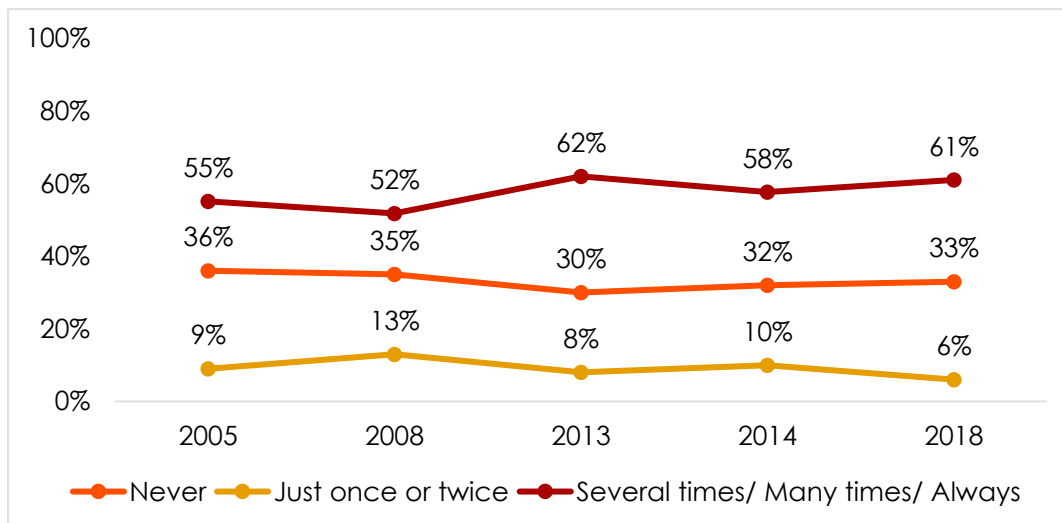
Figure 9: Government performance on food security | by level of lived poverty
 | Madagascar | 2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat?

The importance of this issue is reflected in the large proportion of Malagasy who say they experience food shortages. Consistently since 2013, around six in 10 survey respondents have stated that they or someone in their family went without enough to eat "several times," "many times," or "always" during the 12 months preceding the survey. In 2018, 61% report having experienced hunger at least "several times" during the preceding year, in addition to 6% who say they did so "once or twice." Only one in three respondents (33%) say they "never" experienced food shortages during the period (Figure 10).

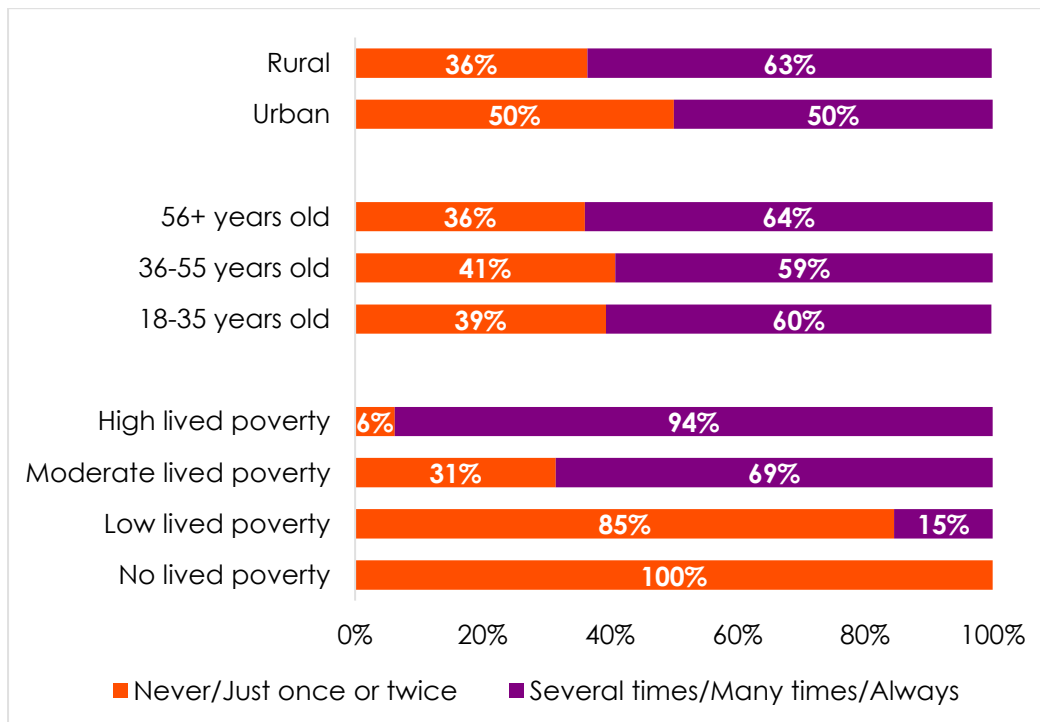
Figure 10: How often went without enough food | Madagascar | 2005-2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough food to eat?

As would be expected, food shortages are most common among the poor: More than nine out of 10 respondents in the “high lived poverty” category (94%) say they went without enough to eat at least “several times” during the past year (Figure 11). Rural residents are more likely to report having experienced food poverty at least “several times” (63%) than urbanites (50%).

Figure 11: How often went without enough food | by socio-demographic group
 | Madagascar | 2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough food to eat?

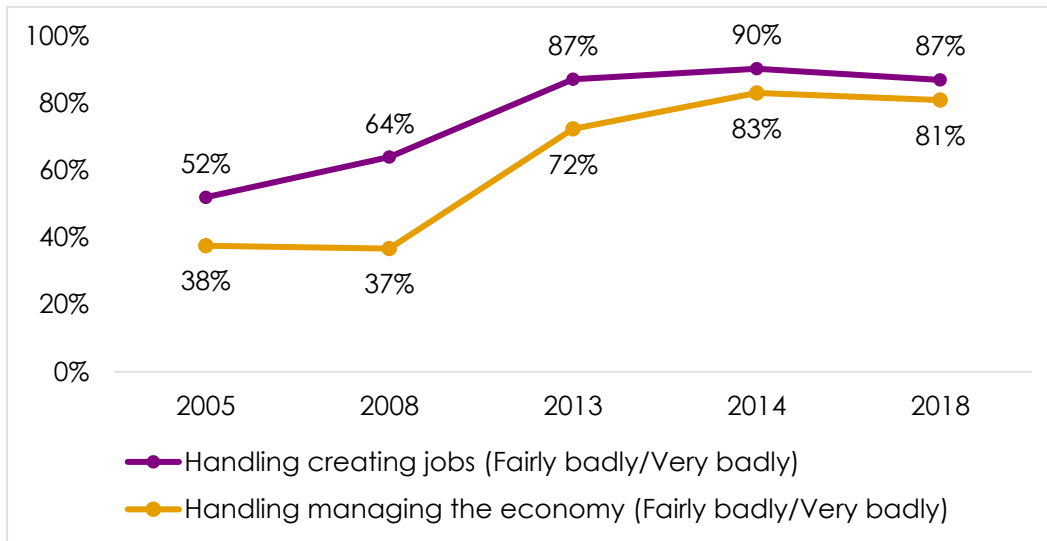
Problems 4-5: Unemployment and management of the economy

About one in five Malagasy (18%) cite unemployment among the most important problems that government should address, and the same proportion prioritize management of the economy. The latter, in particular, has grown in importance for Malagasy, gaining 13 percentage points in comparison to 2014 as a “most important problem.”

Since 2013, around nine in 10 Malagasy have said that the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” at creating jobs. Negative assessments of the government’s efforts against unemployment rose by 35 percentage points between 2005 and 2013 (Figure 12).

Similarly, evaluations of how the government is managing the economy have grown increasingly negative since 2008. In 2018, 81% of Malagasy say the government is handling the economy “fairly badly” or “very badly,” more than double the proportion who thought so in 2005 and 2008.

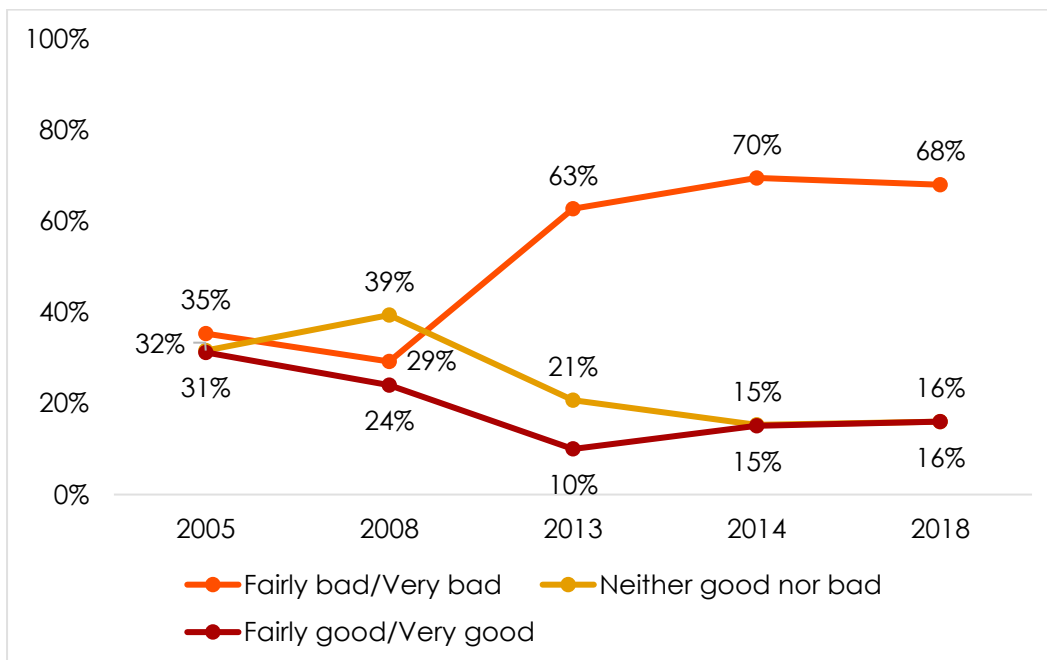
Figure 12: Government performing poorly on job creation and economic management | Madagascar | 2005-2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Creating jobs? Managing the economy? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

These negative evaluations of the government's performance align with increasingly negative assessments of the country's economic condition. Two-thirds (68%) of respondents describe the situation as "fairly bad" or "very bad," which is comparable to 2014 responses (70%) but more than twice as negative as a decade ago (29% in 2008). Only 16% describe the country's economic condition as fairly/very good (Figure 13). Six in 10 (61%) say things have gotten "worse" or "much worse" over the past year (not shown).

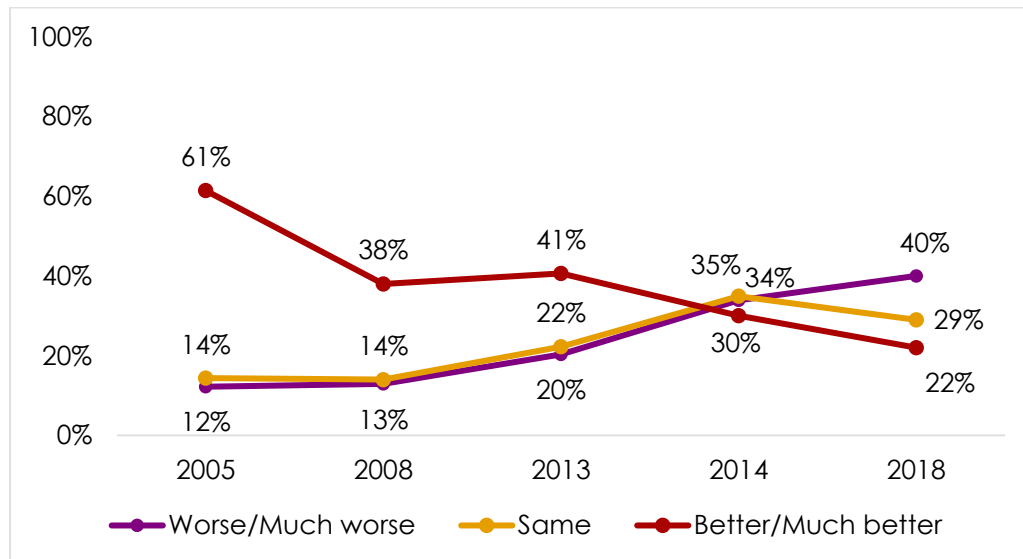
Figure 13: Country's economic condition | Madagascar | 2005-2018



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?

Nor are Malagasy optimistic that things will improve soon. Only about one in five (22%) say they expect economic conditions in the country to be “better” or “much better” in 12 months’ time, while almost twice as many expect things to be “worse” or “much worse” and 29% foresee more of the same (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Country’s economic condition in 12 months’ time | Madagascar
 | 2005-2018



Respondents were asked: Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months’ time?

Conclusion

The winners in December’s elections will have their work cut out for them. Malagasy are increasingly dissatisfied with their government’s performance on what they consider their nation’s most important problems: crime/security, infrastructure/roads, food security, jobs, and the economy. Food shortages, in particular, affect a majority of Malagasy, and almost nine out of 10 citizens are critical of the government’s efforts in this area. For the incoming government, these popular priorities provide a clear roadmap for urgent action.

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