



Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 28

March 2006

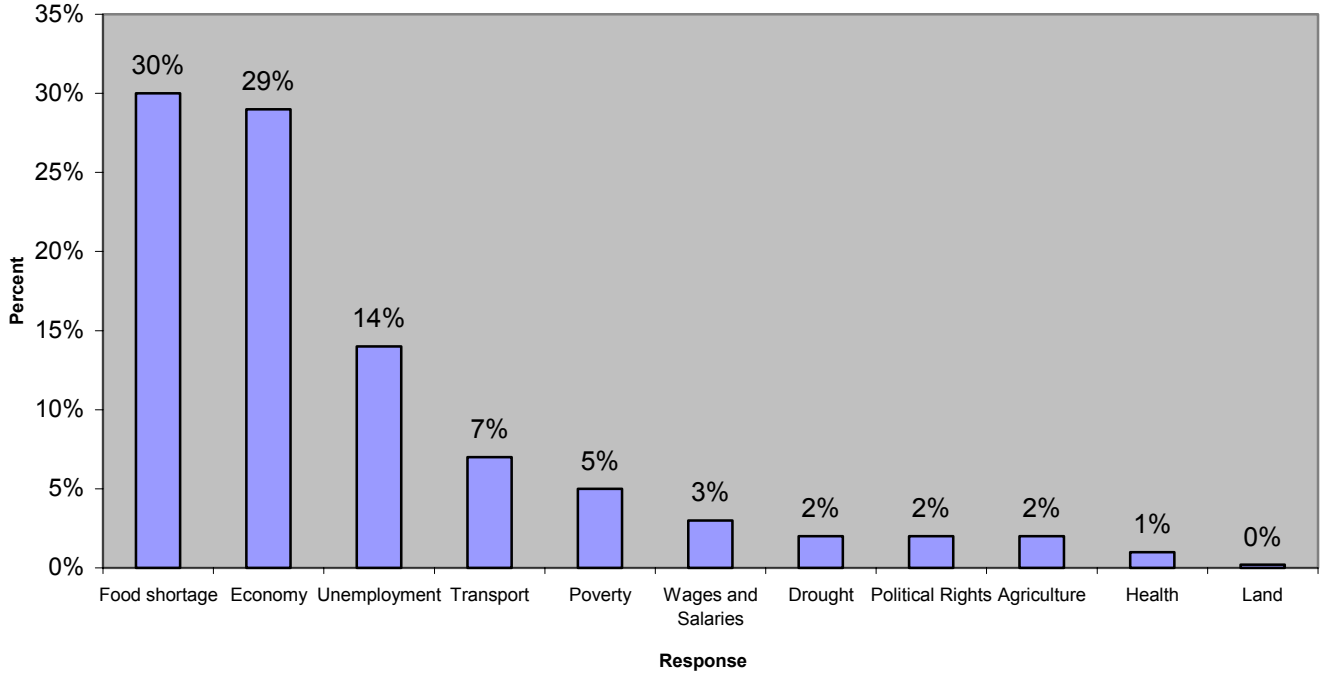
People's Development Agenda and Government's Policy Performance in Zimbabwe

Food insecurity is by far the most troublesome problem for Zimbabweans and has increased substantially between Afrobarometer surveys in mid-2004 and late 2005.) Indeed, in the eyes of the general public, food shortages have dethroned economic management as the number one national problem. Three in ten (31%) adult Zimbabweans now feel that the most important problem they are facing is food shortages. This is one of the most striking findings about the people's development agenda as revealed by the latest Afrobarometer survey.

The survey was conducted from 9 to 26 October 2005 and covered both urban and rural segments of all ten administrative provinces in Zimbabwe. The survey was based on a double sample: a nationally representative random main sample of 1096 respondents and a purposive sub-sample of 104 respondents comprising victims of the Government's Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order. In both cases, respondents were Zimbabwean men and women of voting age. Because of disruptions to fieldwork by some unruly political elements, completion of the survey was aborted towards the end: we were able to complete just 1048 interviews of the main sample and 64 of the sub-sample totalling 1112 interviews. The Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), a Zimbabwean non-governmental research organisation, conducted all fieldwork.

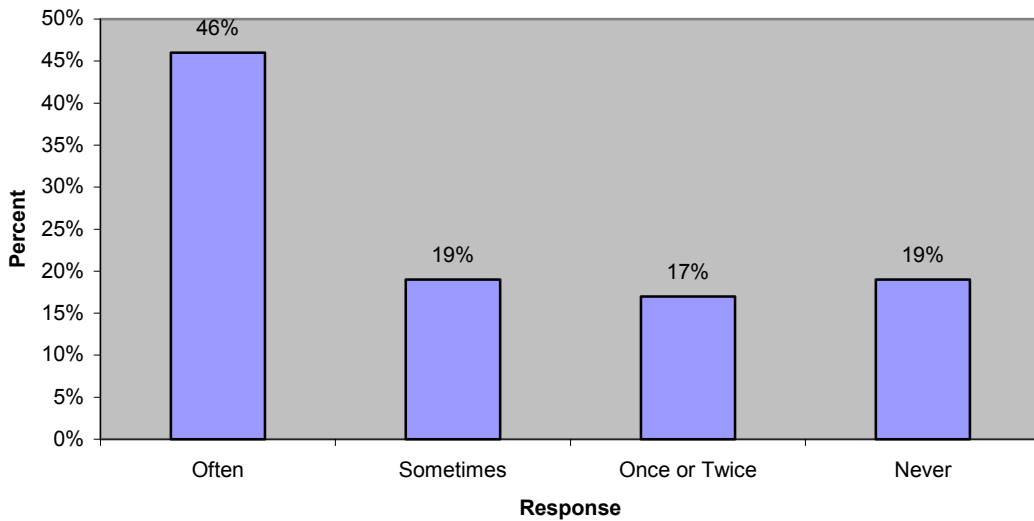
All citizens have their problems, aspirations, and frustrations. Governments are there to try to solve or at least mitigate people's problems and satisfy their aspirations. A perennial question in the three Afrobarometer surveys conducted so far is: "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" Respondents were asked to give up to three answers and, in Figure 1 below, the first responses given are graphically presented.

Figure 1: Most important problems (top ten + land) – 1st responses



In October 2005, three in ten adult Zimbabweans felt that the most important problem they are facing is food insecurity. This is most likely linked to the unemployment problem, ranked third by respondents and distantly to drought, identified by only 2% of the respondents as their first response, see Fig 1 above. The gravity of food shortages is dramatically illustrated by respondents' answer to a different question about how often over the previous year they or any member of their family had "gone without enough food to eat". Only 19% said they had "never" gone without food in the preceding year while a total of 81% had gone without food either "several times" (19%), "often" (24%) or "just once or twice" (22%)(see Fig 2 below).

Figure 2: Gone without enough food to eat in the past year



A close second in the pecking order of people's problems is the management of the economy, a grievance to nearly three in ten (29%) of Zimbabweans. This is followed by unemployment (14%) and transportation, mentioned by 7% of the respondents. The only distinctly *political* problem mentioned among the top ten problems is the violation of human and political rights, which was identified by slightly less than 2% of the sample.

The Zimbabwe Government tells everyone who cares to listen that "land is the economy, and the economy is land." In fact, this slogan was the ruling party's rallying cry in the 2002 presidential election campaign. However, far less than 1% (only 0.2%) of the adult Zimbabweans consider land as the first most important problem. Without a trend analysis, it is tempting to interpret the very low ranking of the problem to mean that the generality of Zimbabweans feel that the land problem had been resolved to people's satisfaction. The Government would claim, for instance, that Constitutional Amendment No. 17 and the fast-track land reform programme put an end to land hunger. However, earlier evidence suggests otherwise. In October 1999, several months before the land invasions, again less than 1% of respondents mentioned land as one of their most important problems, notwithstanding the fact that many of them were then land hungry. And, again in 2004, less than 2% ranked the land issue as one of their most important problems.

Virtually all the critical problems identified and ranked by the Zimbabwean public are related to the ill health of the national economy. Together, they represent a syndrome of economic crisis. Even the other developmental issues mentioned – whether social, infrastructural, and agricultural – are closely associated with the state of the economy, though some may have their deeper roots in the state of governance.

People's Development Agenda – All Responses

When all three options given by respondents are considered, the picture changes marginally, mainly at the bottom of the priority list. Table 1 shows the picture for October 2005 and compares it with the hierarchy of problems eighteen months earlier.

Table 1: Most Important Problems - 2004 and 2005

	Percentage of Respondents	
	2004 (N=1096)	2005 (N=1048)
Food shortage/famine	27	69
Management of the economy	40	45
Transportation	13	39
Unemployment	31	35
Poverty/destitution	19	16
Wages, incomes and salaries	11	9
Drought	-	9
Health	25	8
AIDS	7	8
Education	22	8

Table 2 demonstrates beyond doubt that food insecurity has become the most critical and urgent problem for Zimbabweans and has since mid-2004, overthrown economic management as the people's number one enemy. Food shortages/famine is now mentioned by fully two thirds (69%) of all respondents. Management of the economy, which was the people's number one problem in 2004, now comes in as the second most important problem, being mentioned by nearly half (45%) of all respondents. Public transport, which was one of the lesser problems in 2004, has

worsened and now is the third knottiest problem, which is mentioned by four in ten Zimbabweans. Not only is public transport rarely available but bus fares are constantly rising. Unemployment comes in a close fourth, mentioned by over a third (35%) all respondents.

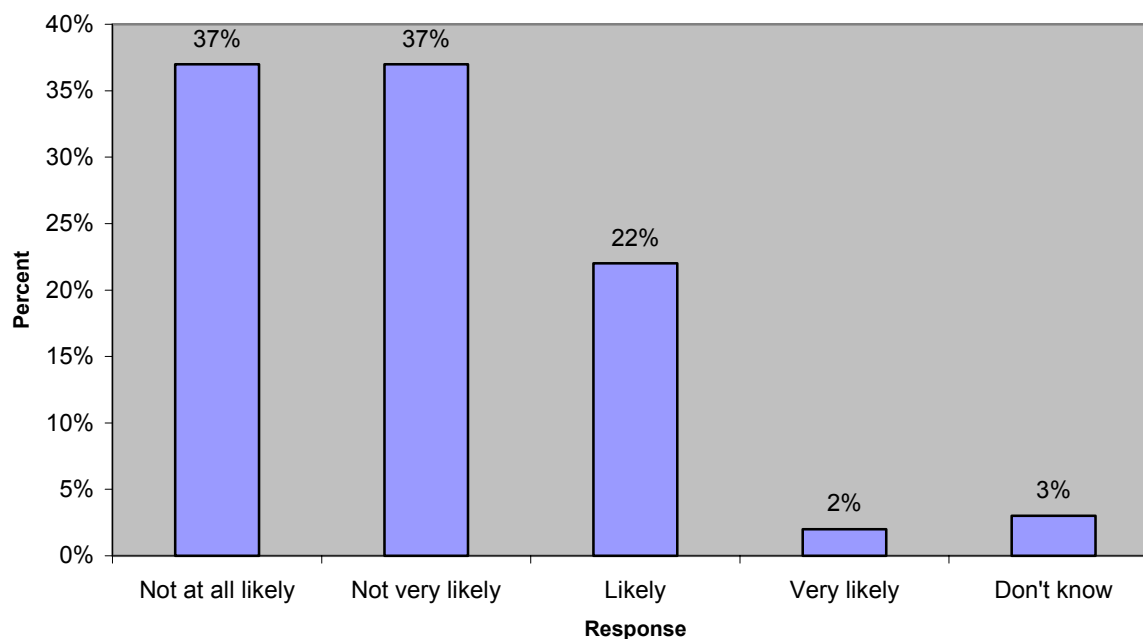
The scourge of HIV-AIDS, which was declared a national disaster and for which a national AIDS fund was established funded by a compulsory levy, is now in the top ten ranking. But, surprisingly, AIDS remains at the lower end of the league table. It is mentioned 8% of the time, and is ranked almost equally with education. AIDS was not even ranked amongst the top ten problems in 2004 even when 78% (compared to 68% in 1999) said they knew someone who had died of the disease. In 2005, almost the same proportion (79%) said they knew of someone who had died of AIDS. It may be mentioned that combating HIV and AIDS is one of the national priority goals of Zimbabwe's eight Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, from the comparative data over time, far fewer people now feel constrained or ashamed to admit they "know someone who has died of AIDS" with only less than 2% avoiding answering this question in 2005 compared to 7% in 1999 and a high of 13% in 2004.

The land question continues to occupy a low priority among the Zimbabwe population with less than 1% of all responses and less than 2% of all respondents mentioning it. Issues like housing and water supply rank much higher than land reform. It should also be noted that when all the responses are taken into account, human and political rights disappear from the radar. In fact, all governance-related issues combined are mentioned less than 5% of the time with corruption at the top, mentioned in about 2% of the time by 5% of all respondents. To all appearances, adult Zimbabweans are too preoccupied with the challenges of economic survival to be bothered too much about the politics of governance.

Perceptions on Government's Likelihood of Solving Problems

That Zimbabweans have a challenging development agenda is indisputable. But are they hopeful that their government can solve these problems? We asked respondents whether they expect the government to solve their most important problems. As Fig 3 and Table 2 below show, there is a pervasive sense of pessimism about government's likelihood of delivering on the people's development agenda. Up to three quarters (74%) of the citizens do not have confidence in the government solving their problems. Only one quarter invest confidence in government's developmental capacity.

Figure 3: Government's likelihood of solving most important problem



The widespread pessimism is rooted in the poor performance of the government as cited by the citizenry. People's performance appraisal of the government is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Government's Policy Performance: 1999-2005

Government Performance	Bad			Good		
	99	04	05	99	04	05
Addressing educational needs	50	41	54	46	57	45
Combating HIV/Aids		29	60		65	39
Improving basic health services	63	53	67	35	44	33
Delivering household water	59	40	64	36	56	31
Reducing crime	66	47	70	31	48	29
Ensuring everyone has enough land	73		69	22		29
Providing housing	67		73	28		23
Fighting corruption in government		38	81		49	17
Ensuring everyone has enough to eat		50	90		39	10
Managing the economy	78	48	93	16	43	6
Creating jobs	77	72	96	20	22	3
Narrowing gaps between rich and poor		70	95		24	4
Keeping prices stable	84	66	97	15	31	3

According to public opinion in October 2005, the worst four areas of performance are: *keeping prices down* (97%); followed by *creating jobs* (96%); *narrowing income gaps* (95%); and *managing the economy* (93%). Figures 4-6 and Table 3 tell the story.

Figure 4: Government's Performance on Managing the Economy: 1999-2005

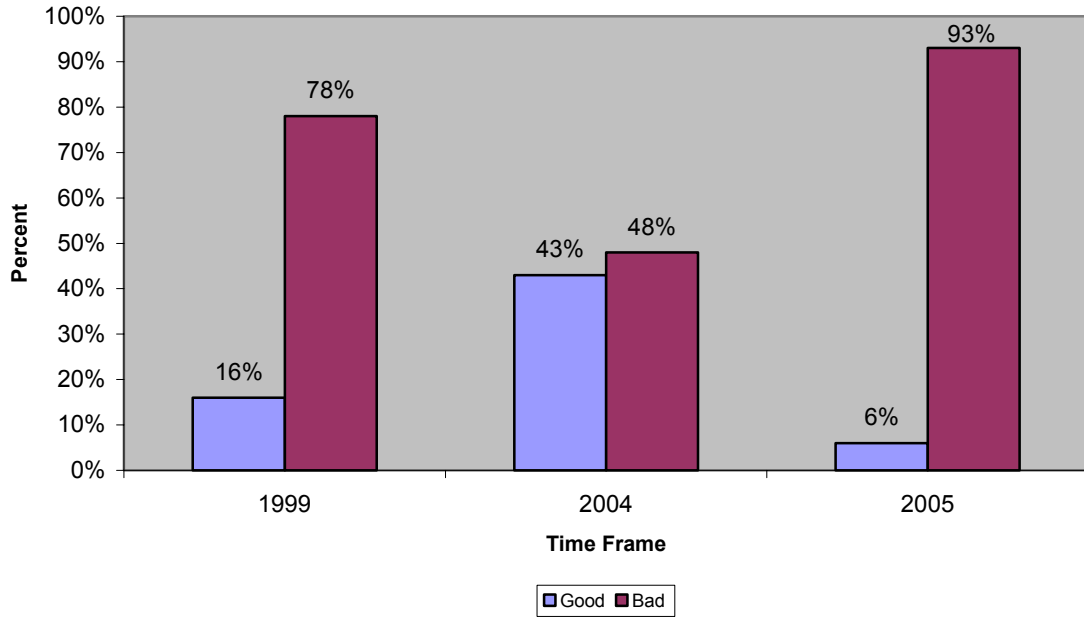


Figure 5: Government's Performance on narrowing income gaps: 1999-2005

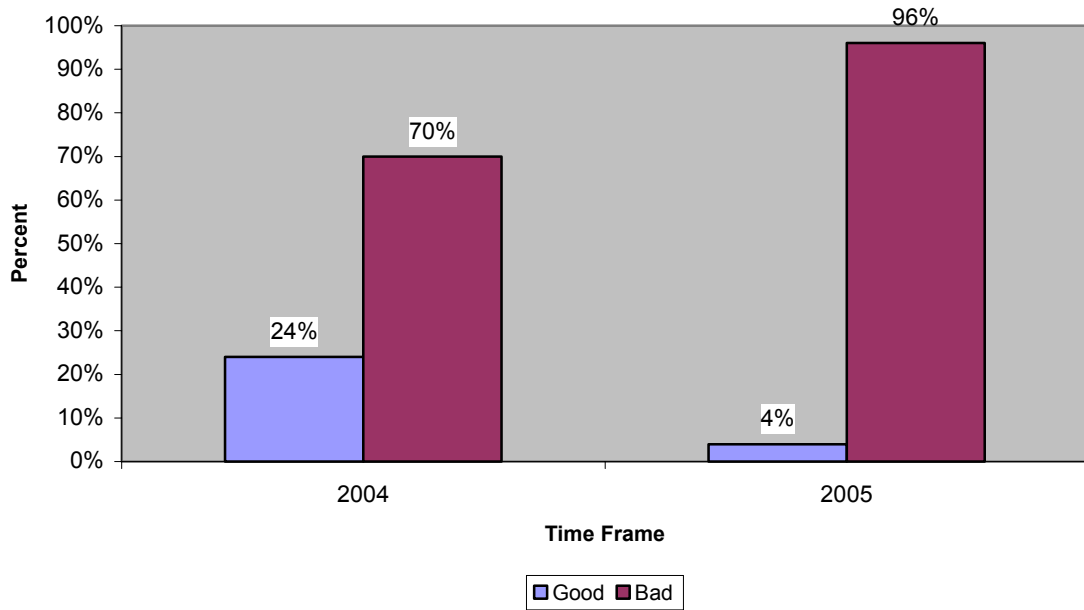
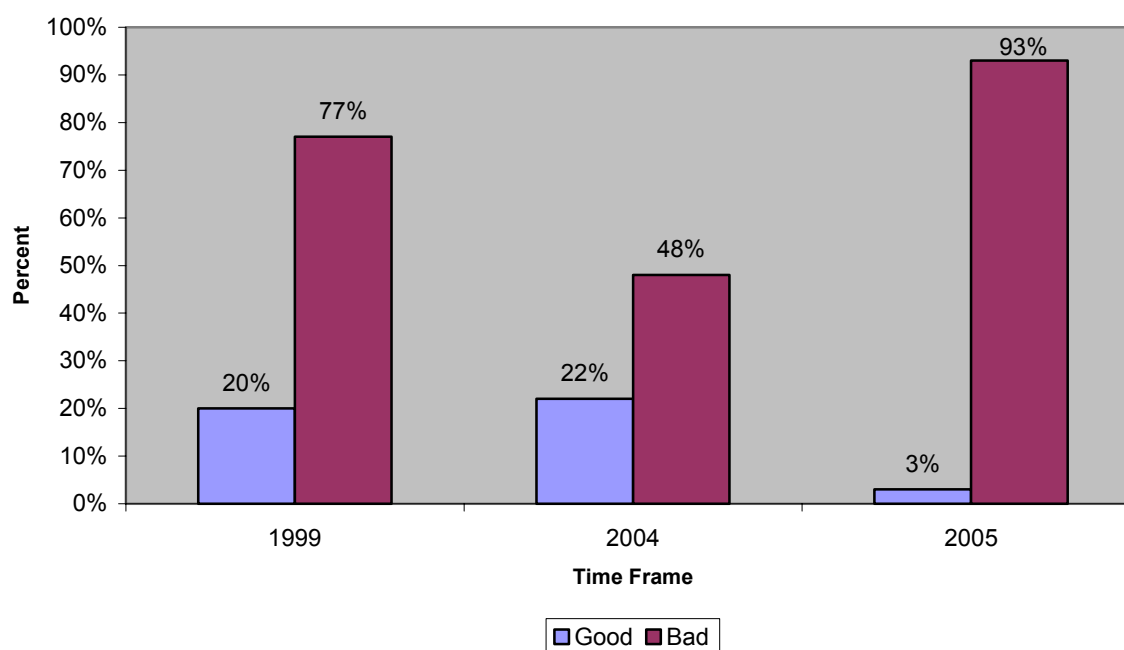


Fig 6: Government's Performance on creating jobs: 1999-2005



The public grants its highest approval ratings to the government's performance at addressing educational needs (44%), combating HIV/AIDS (39%), improving basic health services (33%), delivering household water (31%); and reducing crime (30%). Even in the "best" performance areas, the approval is very lukewarm with most ratings in the "fairly well" category. It may be noted that in no policy sector does the government's performance get a "passing" mark of 50%.

Table 3: Government's Performance: 2004 and 2005 compared

	Good		Change
	2004	2005	
Addressing educational needs	57	45	-12
Combating HIV/Aids	65	39	-26
Improving basic health services	44	33	-11
Delivering household water	56	31	-25
Reducing crime	48	29	-19
Ensuring everyone has enough land	-	-	-
Providing housing	-	-	-
Fighting corruption in government	50	16	-34
Ensuring everyone has enough to eat	39	9	-30
Managing the economy	43	6	-37
Creating jobs	22	3	-19
Narrowing gaps between rich and poor	24	4	-20
Keeping prices stable	31	3	-28

The poor performance of the government at development tasks is reinforced when compared to its 2004 performance record, although this record is itself unflattering. The deterioration in government's performance has cut across the policy spectrum but the perceived decline in performance has been precipitous in some policy sectors, as Table 3 clearly shows. This is the case with regards to economic management, fighting corruption, combating HIV/AIDS – an area

that was the best performer in 2004 -- inflation and food security. The slowest decline in performance has been in social services, notably education and health services.

On current economic conditions, Table 4 shows that more than nine in ten (94%) of the populace describe the country's economic conditions as bad with only 4% describing it as "good". Figure 7 shows comparisons on this item over time. Compared to 2004, the proportion of those who see the conditions as bad has nearly doubled. In short, almost all Zimbabweans are agreed that the country is in the midst of a deep economic crisis.

Figure 7: Zimbabwe economic conditions (1999-2005)

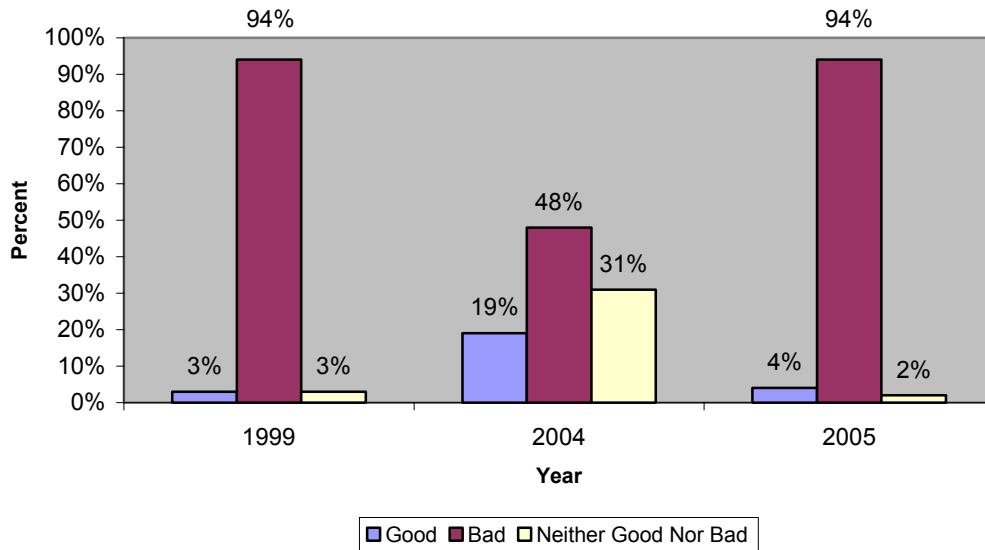


Table 4: Current Economic Conditions (2004 and 2005)

In general, how would you describe ...	Bad		Good		DK	
	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
Your own present living conditions	54	88	27	7	<1	-
The country's economic condition	48	94	31	4	2	<1

Similarly, a very high proportion of citizens express deep worry about personal living conditions with nearly nine in ten (88%) assessing their present economic conditions as either "very bad" (68%) or "fairly bad" (20%). See Table 4 above. Further, 81% of the population sees the economic conditions in the country as having degenerated in the previous twelve months while 78% also view their personal living conditions as having worsened. Only 16% said their personal economic conditions have improved. We interpret these results as at least partly reflecting a loss of opportunities for earning income in the informal sector as a result of the Government's crackdown on private trading under Operation Murambatsvina in mid-2005.

Table 5: Economic Conditions Compared to Previous Year

Looking back, how do you rate the following compared to twelve months ago?	Much worse	Worse	Same	Better	Much better	DK
Economic conditions in this country	59	22	3	12	3	<1
Your living conditions	53	25	6	13	3	<1

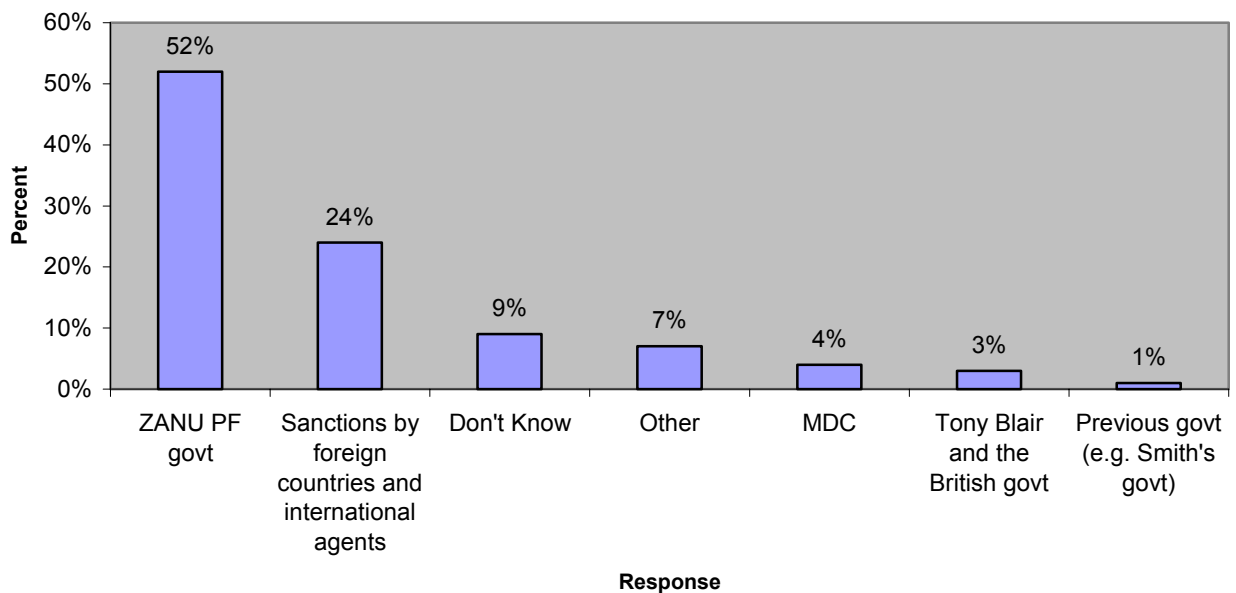
Looking into the future, the results are equally depressing, reflecting (see Table 6) a *strong bias against hope*. There is a deep sense of pessimism, with up to 85% expecting the national economy to deteriorate in the year ahead, compared to only 8% who are optimistic. The same level of pessimism envelopes expectations about personal living conditions in the future with 82% saying their economic conditions will be “much worse” (66%) or “worse” (16%). Less than one in ten expresses hope about personal living conditions improving. In a nutshell, there is a palpable feeling of economic despondency and a sense of despair among Zimbabweans that they are now stuck in a deep economic quagmire. The despair has virtually reached a stage of national fatalism. This negative outlook contrasts with the much more optimistic perspective of citizens as revealed by Afrobarometer Round 3 surveys in other African countries.

Table 6: Expectations of Economic Conditions in Following Year

Looking ahead, do you expect the following to be better or worse?	Much worse	Worse	Same	Better	Much better	DK
Economic conditions in this country in twelve months time	71	14	4	7	1	3
Your living conditions in twelve months time	66	16	6	8	1	3

To conclude: whom do Zimbabweans blame for the sorry state of their affairs? Figure 8 presents the findings. More than half (52%) of Zimbabweans blame the incumbent government for the country’s economic condition. The sanctions message, which Government associates with the “regime change” agenda of Tony Blair and his “imperialist” allies, has been absorbed by just over a quarter (27%) of the citizens. The public largely absolves the opposition MDC and the previous colonial governments of responsibility for current economic conditions. In sum, the argument by Government propagandists that “enemies” outside ZANU-PF are responsible for the desperate economic conditions is not getting many takers among the Zimbabwean public.

Figure 8: Who to blame for country’s economic condition



In summation, the people’s development agenda is a long and difficult one. It is also essentially an economic policy agenda. Zimbabweans are very unhappy with the performance of their

government with regard to a range of problems, feel depressed about the present, and are deeply pessimistic about the future. Moreover, they place most of the blame on their government and see it as unlikely to solve the most important problems that presently besiege the country.

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Eldred Masunungure, Anyway Ndapwadza, Naume Choguya and Noma Sibanda of the Mass Public Opinion Institute, www.mpoi.org.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 18 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and Michigan State University. Several donors support the Afrobarometer's research, capacity-building and outreach activities, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Department for International Development (UK), the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. For more information, see: www.afrobarometer.org