

# Young Nigerians prioritise security, jobs, and the economy for government action

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 708 | Sunday Joseph Duntoye and Raphael Mbaegbu**

## Summary

More than three-fourths of Nigerians (77%) are aged 35 or younger. The median age is 17 (United Nations, 2022; Worldometer, 2023). The country's youthful potential is glaringly obvious, as are the dangers of failing to lay the necessary social, economic, and infrastructure foundations for young people's success (Baiye, 2022).

Beyond providing free primary and early secondary education and offering some technical/vocation training, the government lays out a wide variety of interventions in its National Youth Policy, ranging from study loan schemes for tertiary students and mass literacy centres for out-of-school youth to a job-matching programme for National Youth Service Corps graduates and enterprise development and incubation centres (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). In 2018, the "Not Too Young to Run" law opened space for youth political participation, including lowering the minimum ages for political candidates (from 40 to 35 for would-be presidents) (Amaza, 2022).

Yet millions of young Nigerians confront unemployment, limited opportunities for skills development, and other systemic challenges that limit their participation in social, economic, and political activities (Abdullahi & Saka, 2023). Nigeria ranks as a "low youth development" country, 161<sup>st</sup> out of 181 countries, in the Global Youth Development Index, with particularly low scores on employment and opportunity (173<sup>rd</sup>) and peace and security (168<sup>th</sup>) (Commonwealth, 2021; Punch, 2021).

The Afrobarometer Round 9 survey (2022) offers some insights into the situation of Nigeria's youth (defined here as citizens aged 18-35). Findings show that young people are more educated than their elders, but also more likely to be unemployed. Security, unemployment, and the economy are the most important problems on the minds of young Nigerians, who think their government is doing a poor job on all of these issues. Most see their country as headed in the wrong direction.

Despite their dissatisfaction, Nigerian youth are less likely than their elders to engage in political processes.

## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Nigeria, led by NOIPolls, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians in March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95%

confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Nigeria in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2020.

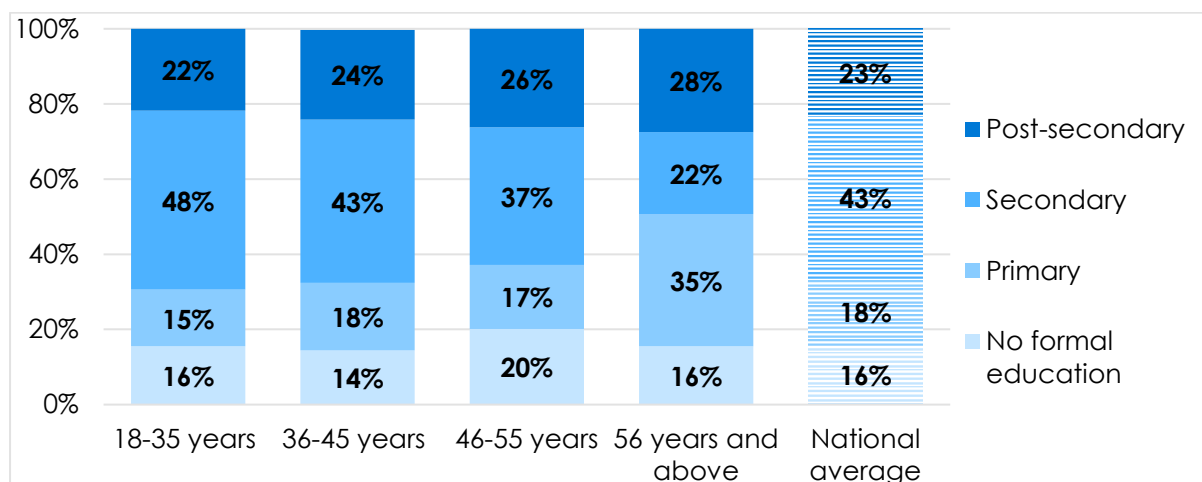
## Key findings

- Seven in 10 young Nigerians (70%) have secondary or post-secondary education, outstripping educational attainment among older generations.
- But youth (aged 18-35) are also more likely than their elders to be unemployed: 24% say they are not employed and are looking for jobs, compared to 11%-16% of older age groups.
- Crime/security, unemployment, and management of the economy are the most important problems that the government must address, according to young Nigerians.
- Among young citizens, approval ratings of the government's performance have plummeted to 14% on economic management, 18% on job creation, 21% on crime, and 27% on education.
- Most youth say the country is going in “the wrong direction” (87%) and offer negative assessments of the nation's economy (84%) and their personal living conditions (69%). About half (49%) expect things to improve over the coming year.
- Young citizens are less likely than their elders to engage in political and civic activities such as voting in elections, attending community meetings, joining with others to raise an issue, and contacting elected officials, though their contact with local government councillors and members of Parliament has been increasing in recent years.

## Education and employment status

Nigeria's youth (aged 18-35) have more education than their elders. Seven in 10 young respondents (70%) report having secondary or post-secondary education, compared to 67%, 63%, and 50% of the older cohorts (Figure 1). Youth are somewhat less likely than older citizens to have post-secondary qualifications (22%, vs. 28% of those aged 56 and above) but far more likely to have secondary schooling (48%, vs. 22% of the oldest group).

**Figure 1: Level of education | by age group | Nigeria | 2022**

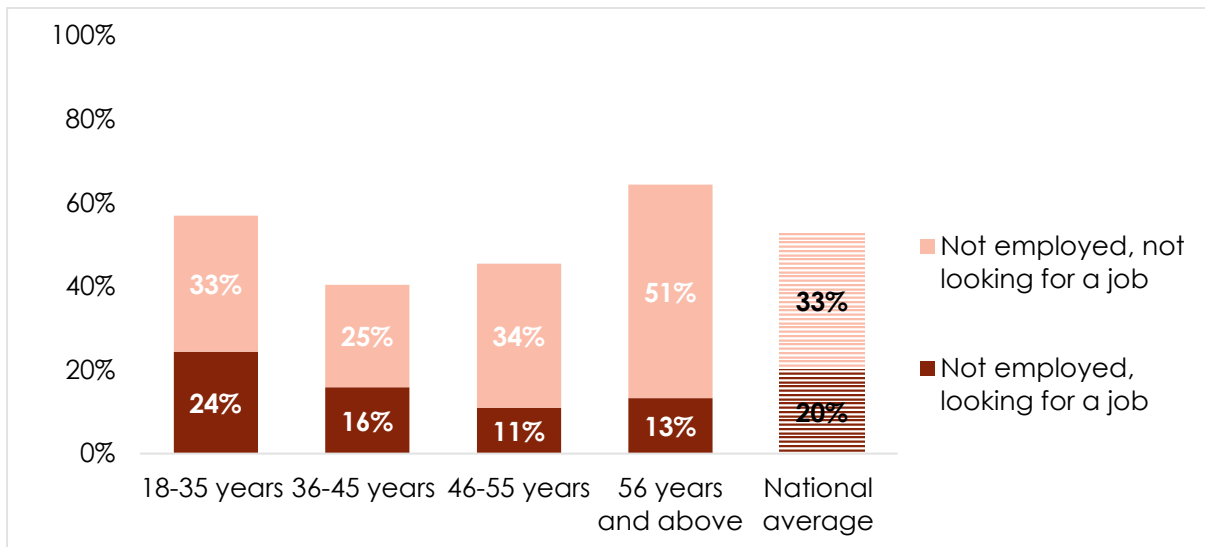


**Respondents were asked:** What is your highest level of education?

While they are more educated than their elders, young Nigerians are also more likely to be unemployed. About one in four youth (24%) say they are not employed and are looking for a job, compared to 11%-16% of older adults (Figure 2). These youth who are unemployed (i.e. not employed and looking for work) include 4% who identify as students (Figure 3).

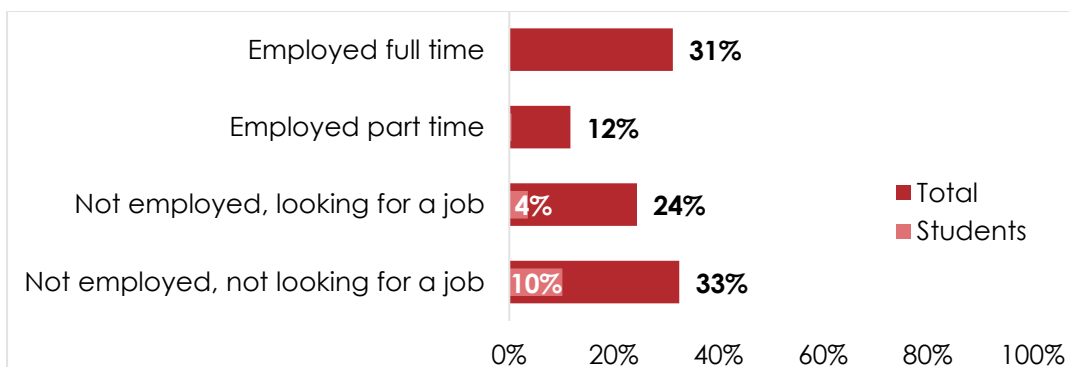
In addition, 33% of young respondents say they are not employed and are not looking for work, including 10% who identify as students.

**Figure 2: Unemployment rate | by age group | Nigeria | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job?

**Figure 3: Employment and student status | respondents aged 18-35 years | Nigeria | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:**

Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job?

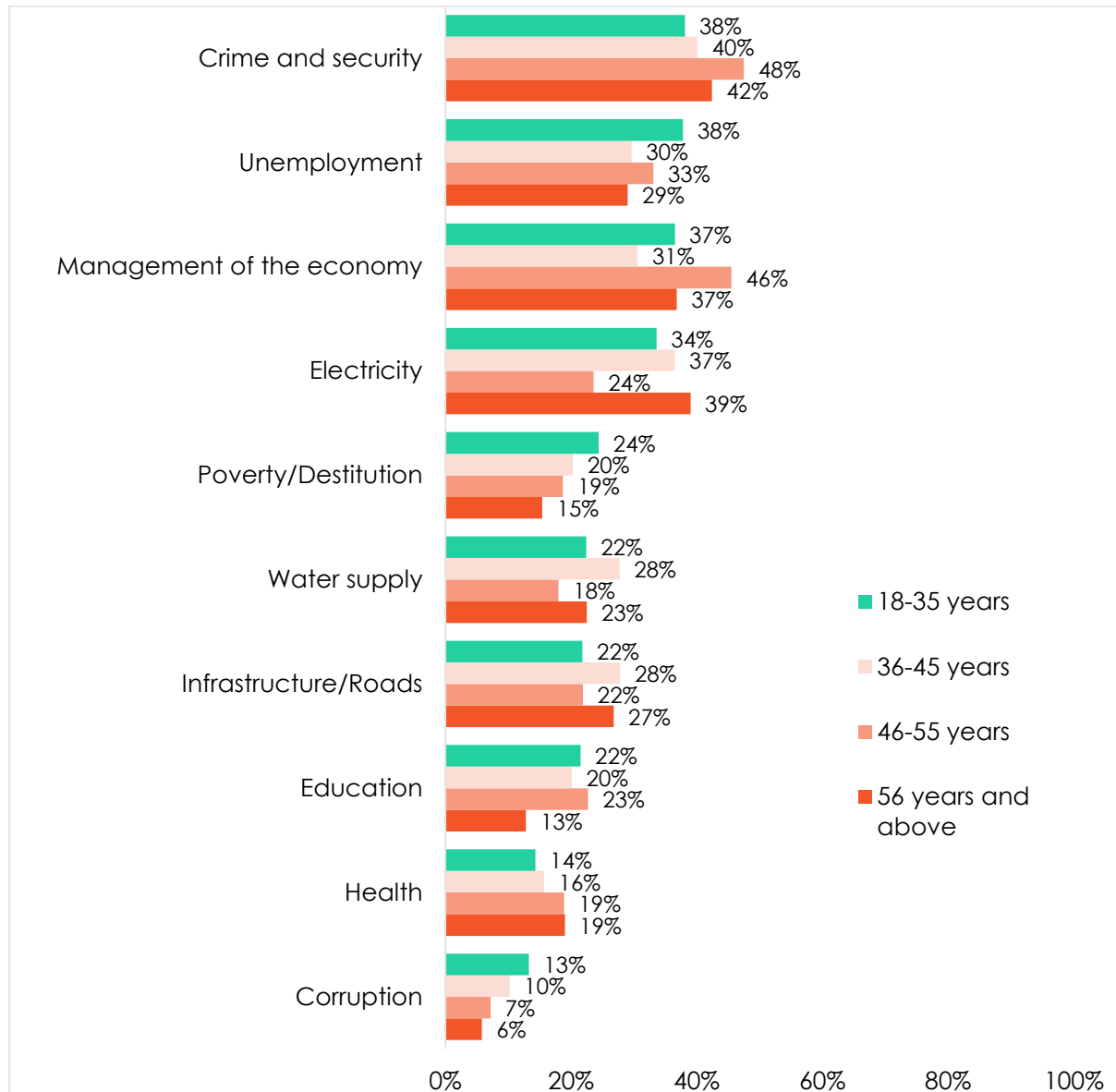
What is your main occupation? [If not currently working:] What was your last main occupation? (% who say "student")

### Priorities for action

For young Nigerians, crime/security and unemployment (each cited by 38%) are the two most important problems that the government must address (Figure 4). These are followed by management of the economy (37%), electricity (34%), poverty (24%), water supply (22%), infrastructure/roads (22%), and education (22%).

Youth don't differ hugely from their elders in their priorities for government action, though they are somewhat more likely to focus on unemployment (by a 9-percentage-point margin compared to those over age 55), poverty, and corruption and somewhat less likely to cite health as a top problem.

**Figure 4: Most important problems | by age group | Nigeria | 2022**



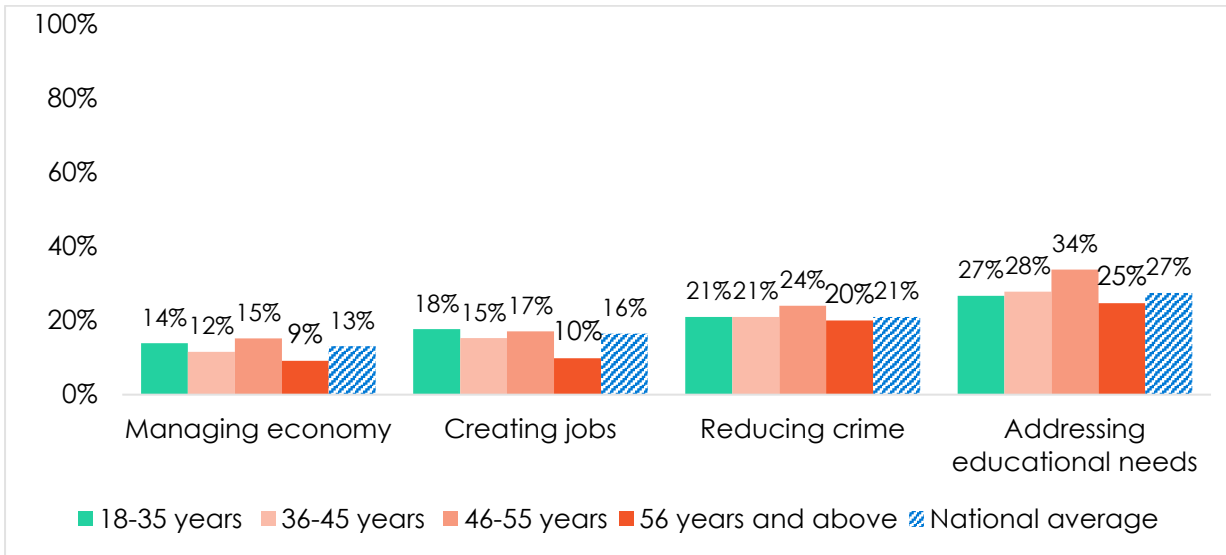
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per person; figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem among their three priorities.)

### Evaluation of government performance

Like their elders, young Nigerians are highly critical of the government's performance on key issues affecting their lives. Fewer than one in five say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on managing the economy (14%) and creating jobs (18%), while only 21% approve of government efforts to reduce crime and 27% give positive appraisals on addressing educational needs (Figure 5).

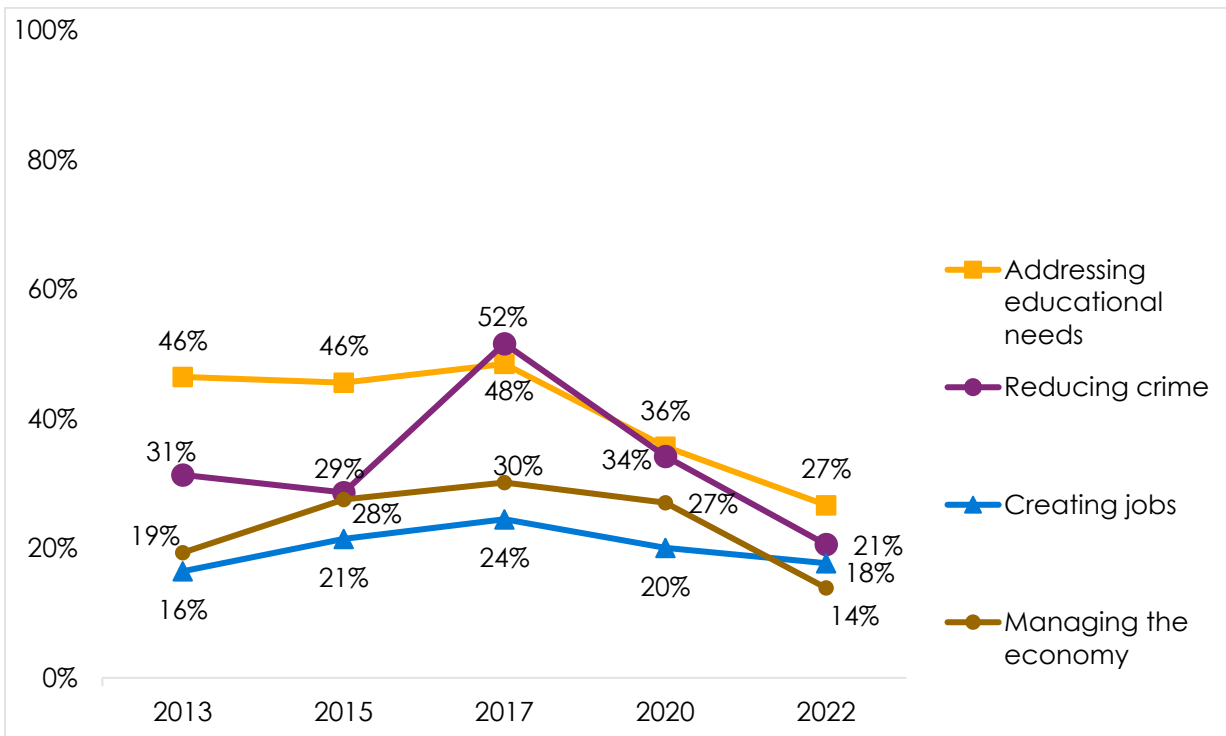
Young Nigerians' assessments of the government's performance on these three key issues have varied widely over the past decade, hitting high points – highest approval – in the 2017 survey and dropping to low points in 2022 (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Approval of government performance on the economy, jobs, crime, and education | by age group | Nigeria | 2022**



**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? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

**Figure 6: Youth approval of government performance on the economy, jobs, crime, and education | respondents aged 18-35 years | Nigeria | 2013-2022**

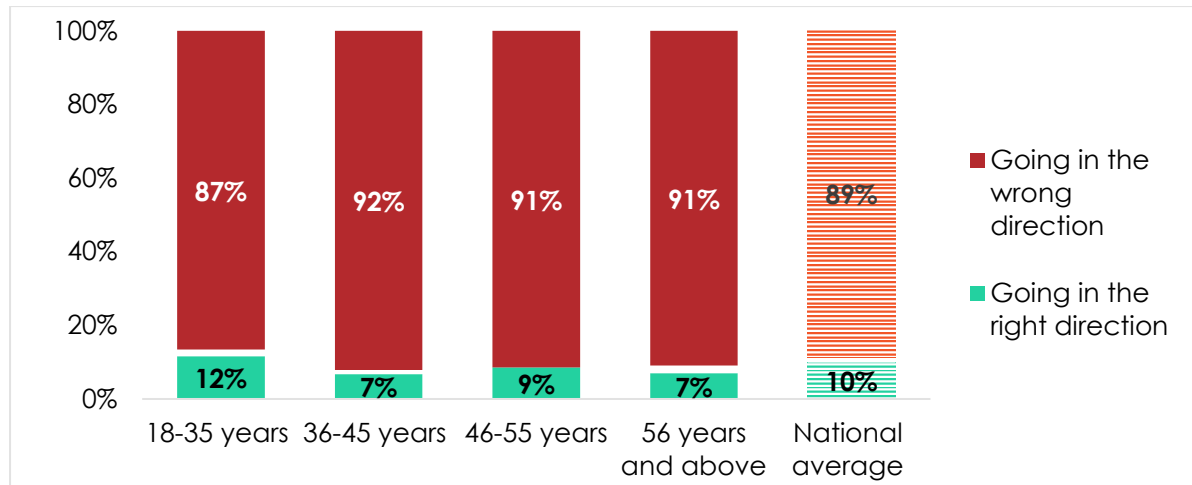


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

## Views on country's direction and economic situation

Overall, young Nigerians are only marginally less pessimistic than their elders about their country's direction: 87% say Nigeria is headed in "the wrong direction" compared to 91%-92% of middle-aged and older citizens (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Country's direction** | by age group | Nigeria | 2022

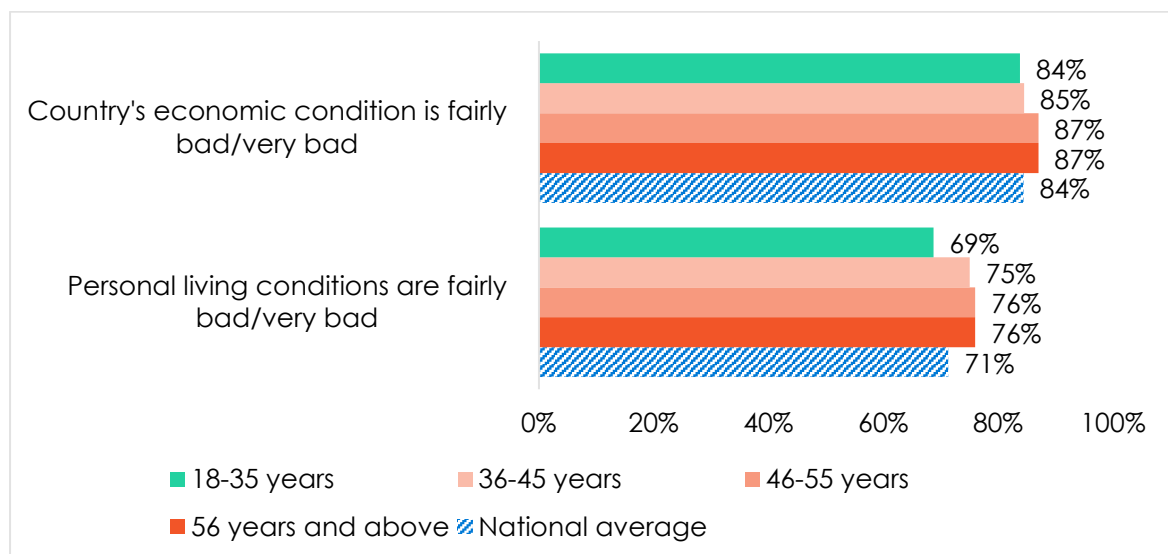


**Respondents were asked:** Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

More than eight out of 10 young Nigerians (84%) describe the country's economic condition as "fairly bad" or "very bad," roughly matching assessments by other age groups (Figure 8).

And a strong majority (69%) say their personal living conditions are bad as well, only slightly less negative than older cohorts (75%-76%).

**Figure 8: Negative assessments of country's economy and personal living conditions** | by age group | Nigeria | 2022

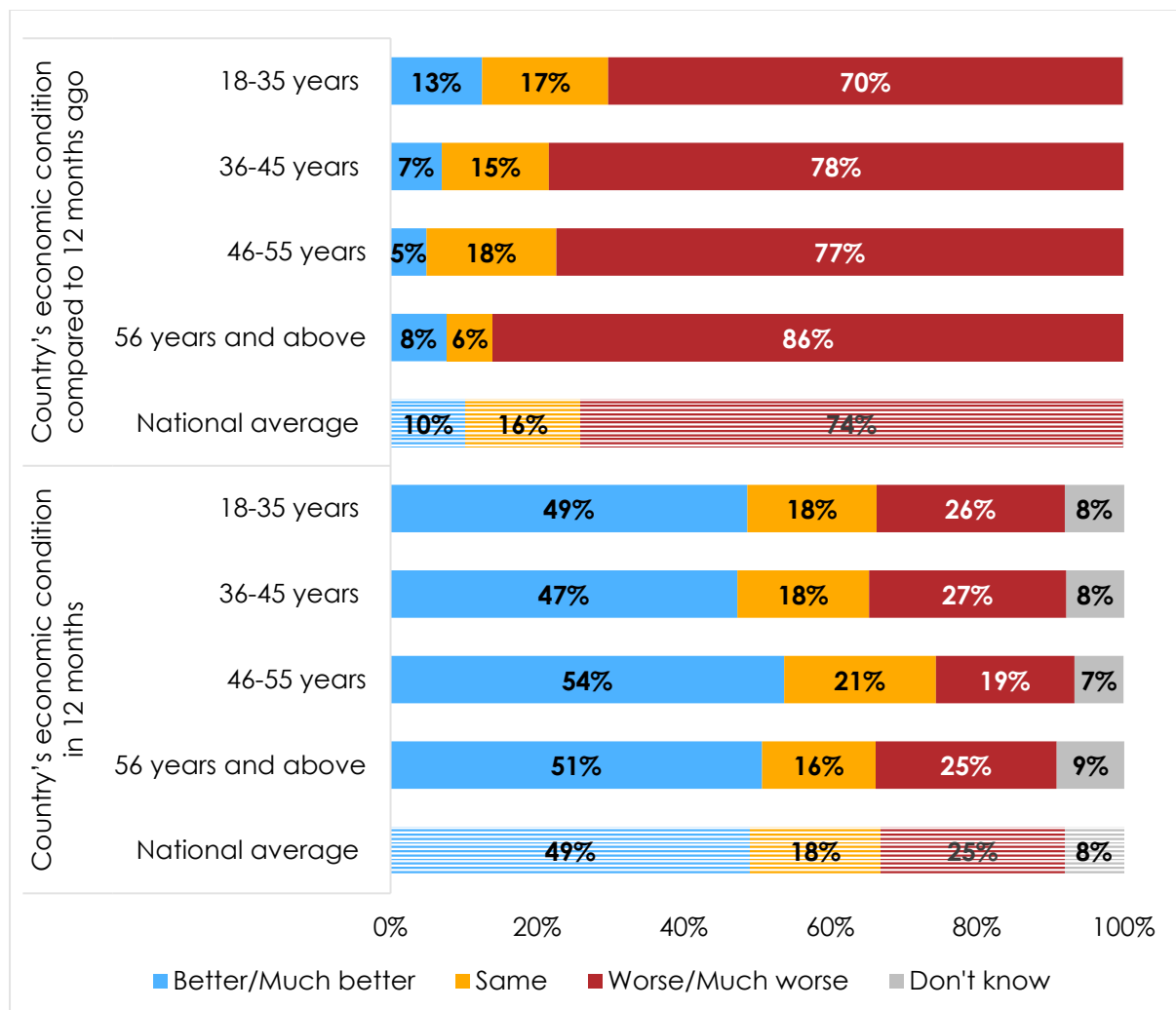


**Respondents were asked:** In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions? (% who say "fairly bad" or "very bad")

Only about one in eight youth (13%) think the country's economic conditions have improved over the past year, while 70% say they have worsened. Though overwhelmingly negative, these assessments are somewhat more positive than those offered by older citizens (Figure 9).

Young citizens express about the same level of optimism as their elders about the near future: Half (49%) think things will get better over the next 12 months, while 26% expect them to get worse and 18% look ahead to more of the same.

**Figure 9: Retrospective and prospective assessments of country's economic conditions | Nigeria | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago? Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

### Political engagement

Considering young Nigerians' dissatisfaction with economic conditions, the country's overall direction, and their government's performance, to what extent do they engage in political and civic processes in pursuit of change?

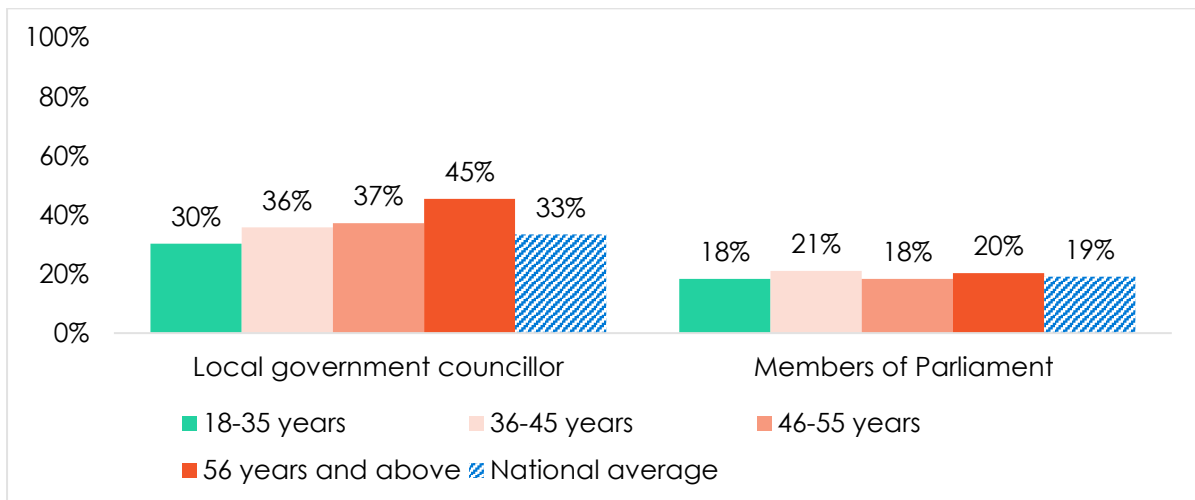
Survey findings suggest that youth have room to extend their potential influence through pathways such as contacting their elected officials, joining with others to express their concerns, and voting in elections.

Three in 10 young respondents (30%) say they contacted a local government councillor about an important issue at least once during the year preceding the survey, a lower contact rate than recorded for their elders (36%-45%) (Figure 10).

Only 18% report having contacted a member of Parliament (MP), about average for all age groups (18-21%).

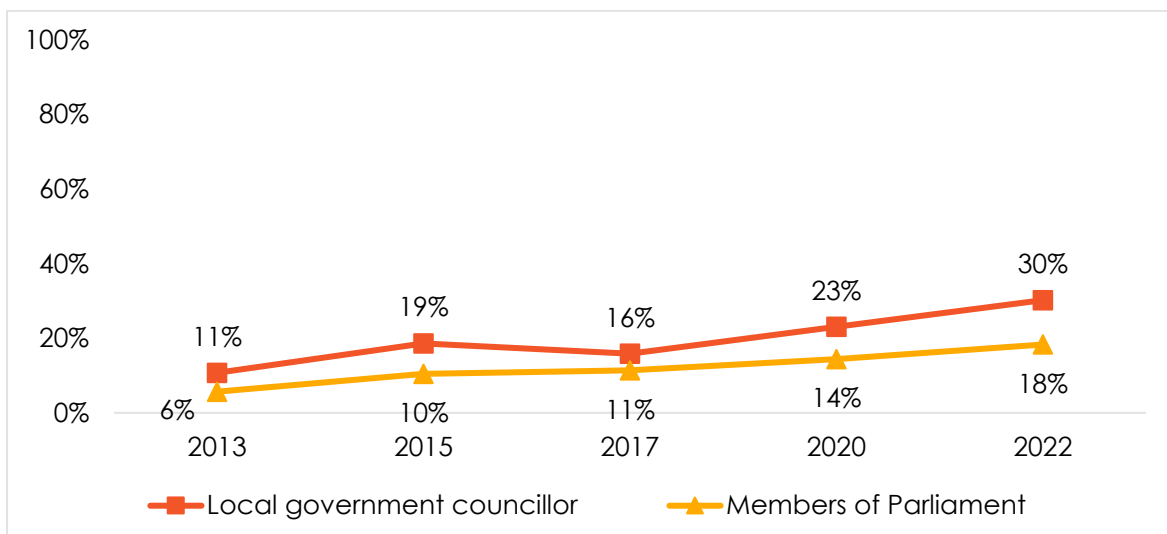
However, young people's contact with elected representatives has been increasing, roughly tripling over the past decade with regard to local government councillors (from 11% in 2013 to 30% in 2022) and MPs (from 6% to 18%) (Figure 11).

**Figure 10: Contacted political representatives during previous year | by age group | Nigeria | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say “only once,” “a few times,” or “often”)

**Figure 11: Youth contact with political representatives | respondents aged 18-35 years | Nigeria | 2013-2022**



**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say “only once,” “a few times,” or “often”)



Youth also lag behind their elders when it comes to voting, identifying with political parties, attending community meetings, and joining others to raise an issue (Figure 12).

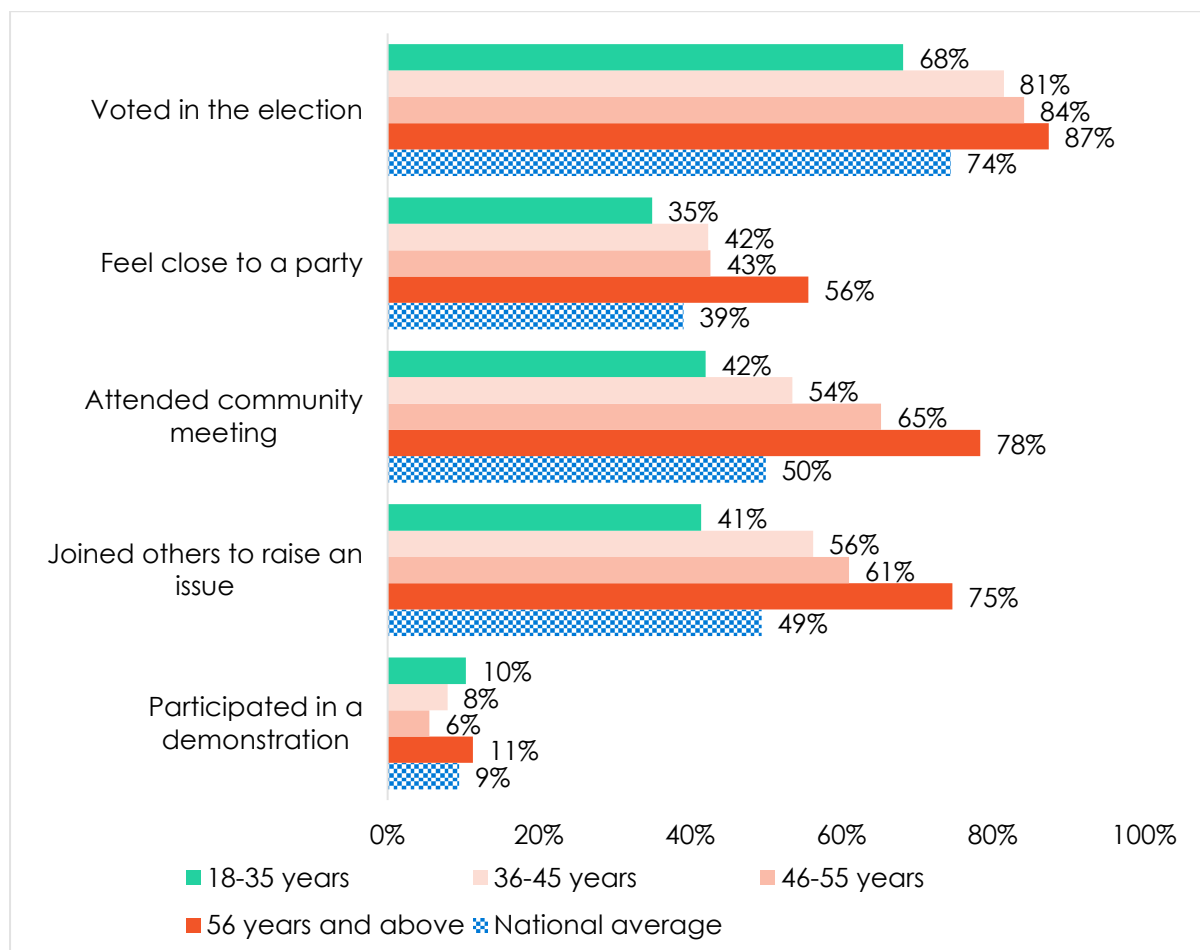
While about two-thirds (68%) of 18- to 35-year-olds say they voted in the most recent national election in 2019 (excluding those who were too young to vote), that's a considerably lower rate than reported by older cohorts (81%-87%).

Youth are also somewhat less likely to say they “feel close to” a political party (35%, vs. 42%-56% of older citizens).

About four in 10 young respondents say they attended a community meeting (42%) or joined others to raise an issue (41%) at least once during the previous year – again lower rate than reported by older age cohorts.

One in 10 (10%) report having participated in a demonstration or protest march during the past 12 months, which is about average for the adult population (9%).

**Figure 12: Political participation** | by age group | Nigeria | 2022



**Respondents were asked:**

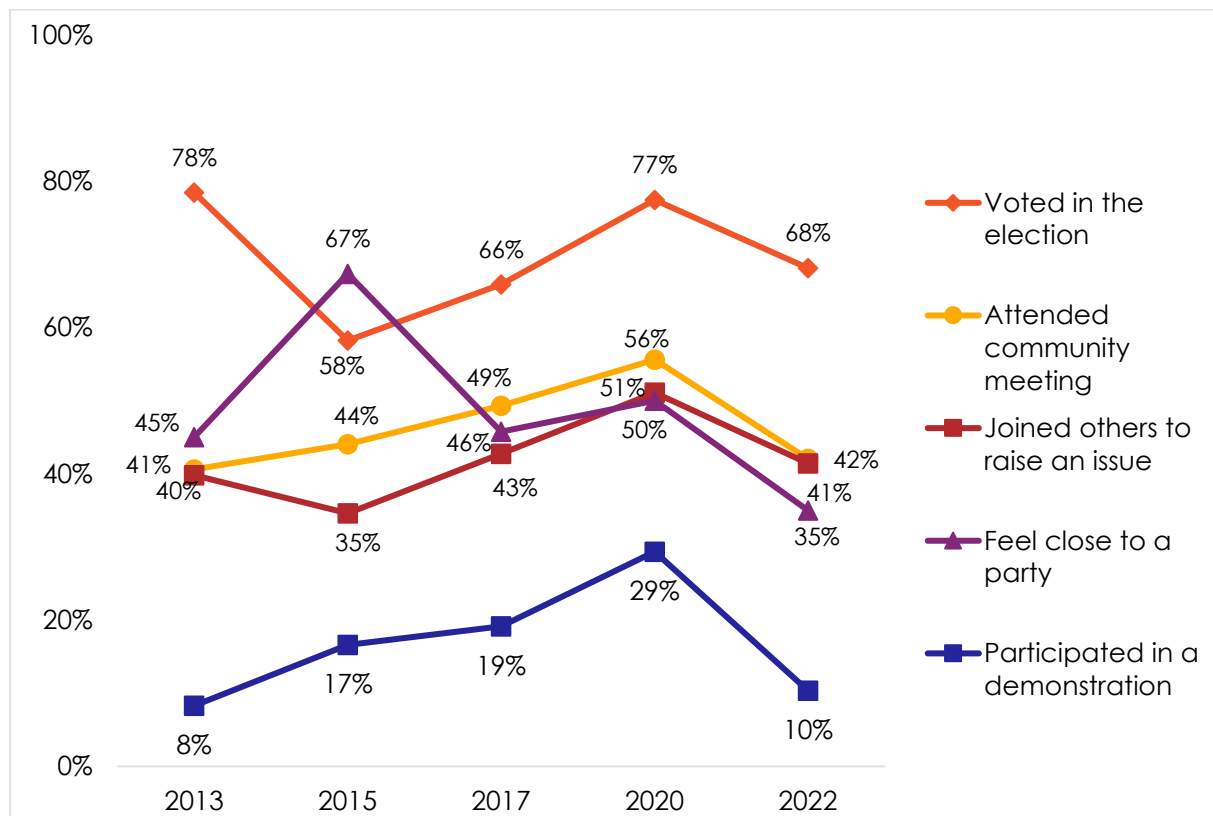
*In the last national election, held in 2019, did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (Respondents who were too young to vote in 2019 are excluded.)*

*Do you feel close to any particular political party?*

*Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? Got together with others to raise an issue? Participated in a demonstration or protest march? (% who say “once or twice,” “several times,” or “often”)*

Among youth, self-reported voting in elections, joining others to raise an issue, attending community meetings, and participation in protests climbed to high points in the 2020 survey and then dropped to significantly lower levels in 2022 (Figure 13). Identification with political parties was highest in 2014 (67%) and dropped by almost half to 35% in 2022.

**Figure 13: Youth political participation** | respondents aged 18-35 years | Nigeria | 2013-2022



**Respondents were asked:**

*In the last national election, held in [year], did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (Respondents who were too young to vote are excluded.)*

*Do you feel close to any particular political party?*

*Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? Got together with others to raise an issue? Participated in a demonstration or protest march? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often")*

**Conclusion**

Nigeria's youth are more educated and less employed than their elders. Most are pessimistic in their assessments of their country's economy and overall direction. Insecurity, unemployment, and economic management top the list of their policy priorities – all issues on which most youth think the government is failing.

Survey findings also suggest that young Nigerians are not fully exploiting their potential in political and civic processes to ensure that their voices are heard, their concerns are addressed, and their futures are secured.

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