

# Africa's youth: More educated, less employed, still unheard in policy and development

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 734 | Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, Shannon van Wyk-Khosa, and Joseph Asunka**

## Summary

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063 emphasise the vital role of young people in catalysing sustainable and transformative governance and development in Africa (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2017). Home to a population with a median age of about 19, Africa's trajectory stands to gain immensely from its youth if their energies and skills are harnessed effectively and they are given the space and opportunity to contribute to public policy and decision making.



For now, young people remain grossly under-represented in formal governance structures as well as political discourse, understood to be an important voting bloc but marginalised from meaningful decision-making processes (Ayaji, Gukurume, & Bangura, 2022). As Niang (2019) observes, Africa has the world's youngest population and some of its oldest leaders. A combination of legal barriers (e.g. age and financial requirements for public office) and social norms systematically undermines active participation of young people, especially young women, in public policy and development decisions. This disconnect between African political systems – dominated by old men, especially at the highest levels – and African youth results in governance and policy that do not keep pace with the needs and expectations of young people (Ibrahim, 2019).

Critics often cite a lack of interest in politics among young people, particularly when it comes to political parties and voting. However, the explosion of youth participation in unconventional political processes, notably online political and social movements, shows that many are in fact engaged and suggests that their participation may depend on the likelihood that their voices will be heard and will contribute to tangible political change (Van Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019).

Afrobarometer Round 9 survey results highlight the views and experiences of young Africans as well as some of the challenges they face. Across the continent, unemployment is the top policy priority that 18- to 35-year-olds want their governments to address. Although African youth are more educated than their elders, they are also more likely to be unemployed, and they overwhelmingly give their governments failing marks on job creation. More broadly, compared to older generations, young people are less trustful of government institutions and leaders and more likely to view them as corrupt.

Even so, young Africans are just as committed to democracy and opposed to non-democratic alternatives, including military rule, as their elders. But young Africans are particularly dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their countries, and in the event that elected leaders abuse their power, younger Africans are more likely than their elders to countenance military intervention.

As for political engagement, African youth are less involved than older cohorts in conventional processes such as voting, identifying with a political party, and attending community meetings, but are more likely to participate in demonstrations or protests.

## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. (See Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates.)

Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. This 39-country analysis is based on 54,436 interviews. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

## Key findings

### On education and employment status:

- Young Africans (aged 18-35) are more educated than their elders: Almost two-thirds (64%) of youth have had at least some secondary school education, compared to 35% of those aged 56 and older.
- But they are considerably more likely than their elders to be out of work and looking for a job.

### On policy priorities:

- Unemployment tops the list of the most important problems that African youth want their government to address, followed by management of the economy and health.
- On average across 39 countries, only two in 10 youth (19%) say their government is performing well on job creation.

### On their country's direction and economy:

- About two-thirds of young people say their country is going in "the wrong direction" (66%) and describe its economic condition as "fairly bad" or "very bad" (64%).

### On attitudes toward democracy and leaders:

- Like their elders, young Africans support democracy (64%) and reject such authoritarian alternatives as one-man rule (80%), one-party rule (78%), and military rule (65%).
- However, six in 10 (60%) are dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their country.
- Young Africans are more likely than older cohorts to see state institutions and leaders as corrupt and to mistrust them.

- Youth are also more willing to tolerate a military takeover of the government if elected leaders abuse their power (56% among those aged 18-35 vs. 47% among those aged 56 and above).

**On political engagement:**

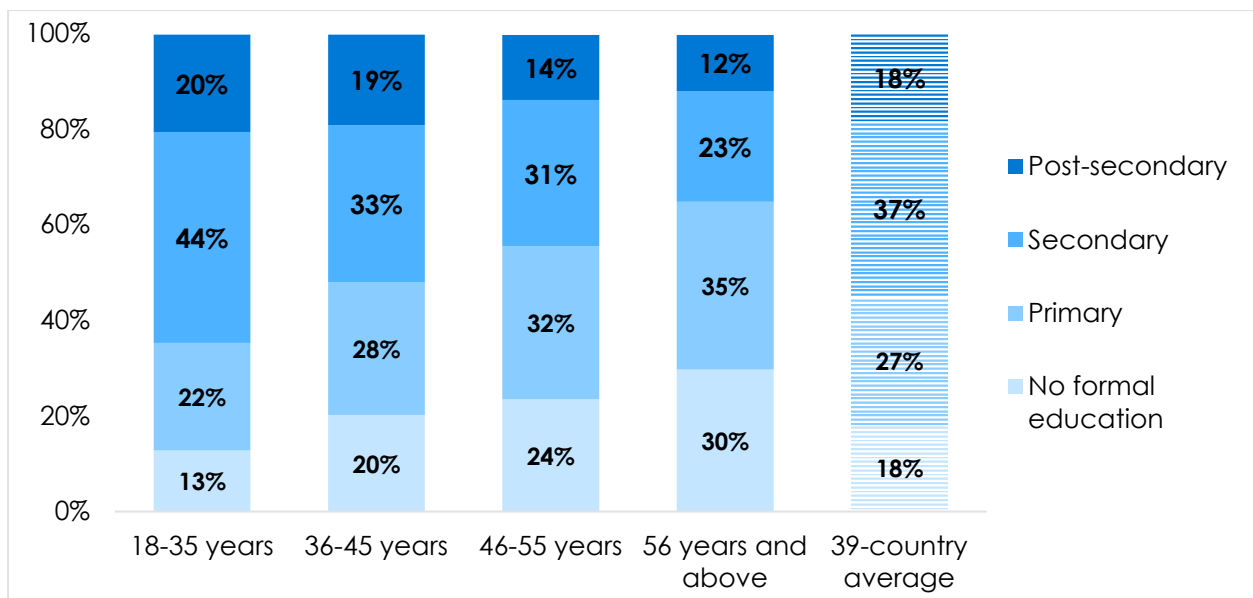
- Youth are less likely than older citizens to vote in elections, identify with a political party, attend a community meeting, join others to raise an issue, and contact a local leader.
- Among young people, fewer women than men engage in political processes.

**Education and employment status**

Quality education is one of the main objectives of Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2023) as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 4). Although the continent has made modest progress in some aspects of education in the past decade, in particular regarding access and dropout rates (UNICEF & African Union Commission, 2021), it continues to lag behind other world regions on many indicators (Klapper & Panchamia, 2023).

The modest progress may have contributed to improvements in educational attainment on the continent: The latest round of Afrobarometer surveys shows that young Africans are, on average, more educated than their elders. Across 39 countries surveyed in 2021/2023, almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents aged 18-35 have had at least some secondary education, compared to 52%, 44%, and 35% of the progressively older cohorts (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> One in eight young adults (13%) report having no formal education, fewer than half as many as among those above age 55 (30%).

**Figure 1: Educational level | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



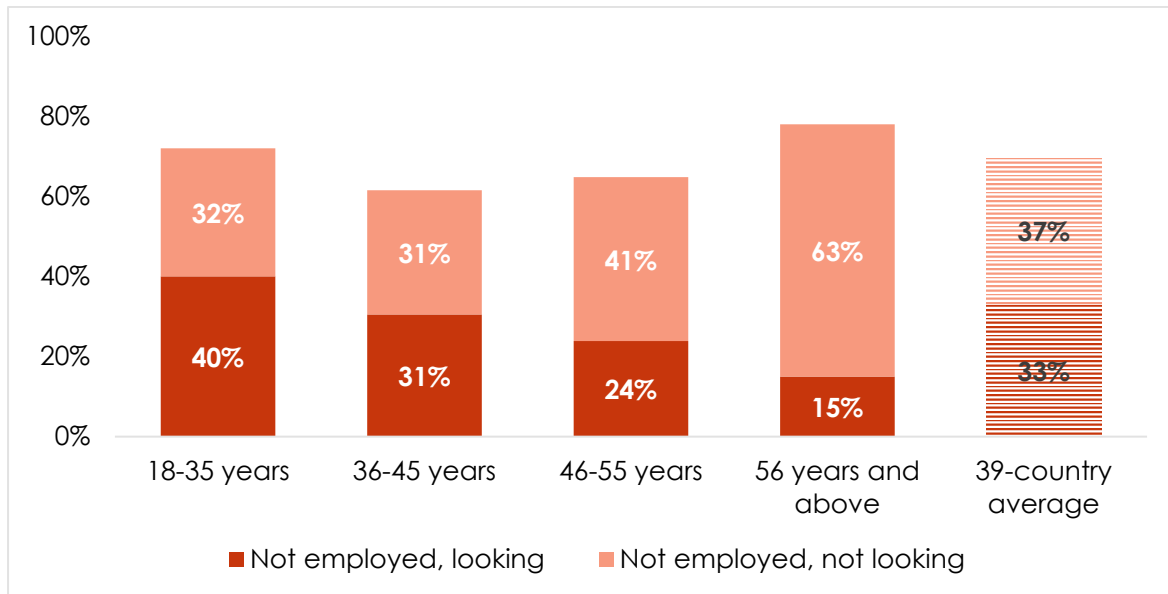
**Respondents were asked:** *What is your highest level of education?*

<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. among 46- to 55-year-olds, 31% “secondary” and 14% “post-secondary” sum to 44%).

Although they are more educated, African youth are less likely than their elders to be employed. On average, four in 10 young adults (40%) are unemployed and looking for a job, a considerably larger proportion than among the middle-aged (24%-31%) and older citizens (15%) (Figure 2).

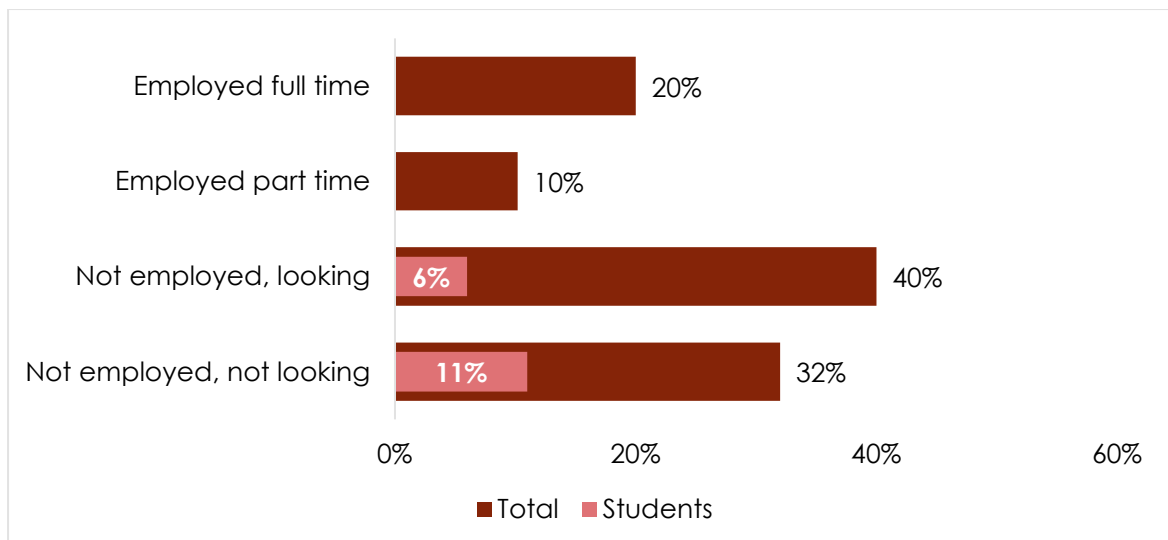
In addition, one-third (32%) of young adults say they are not employed but not looking for jobs, including 11% who are students (Figure 3).

**Figure 2: Unemployment rate | by age group | 38 countries\* | 2021/2023**



**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? (\* Employment data are not available for Mauritius.)

**Figure 3: Employment and student status | respondents aged 18-35 years | 38 countries\* | 2021/2023**



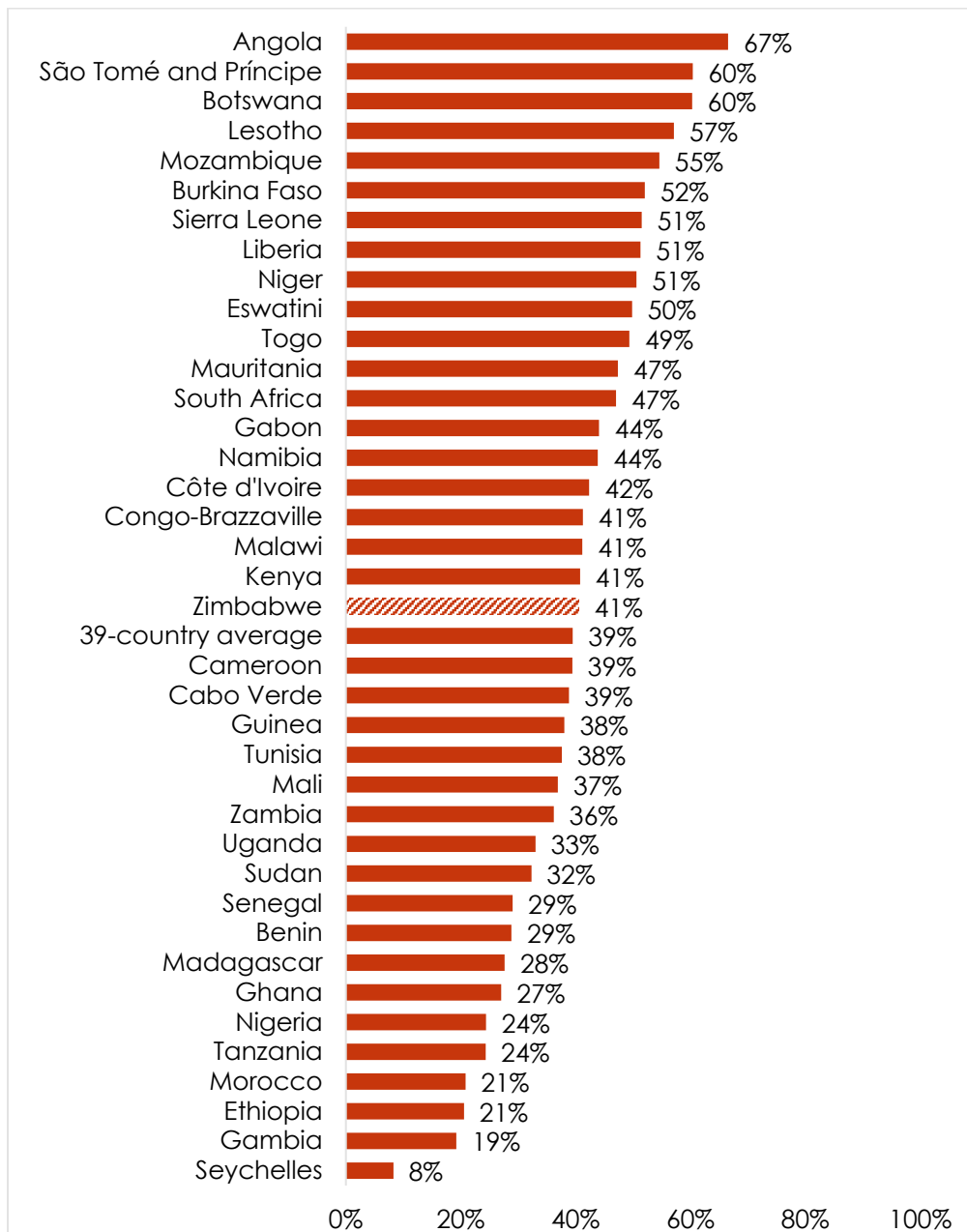
**Respondents were asked:**

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") (\* Employment data are not available for Mauritius.)

Youth unemployment is particularly high in Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Botswana, where at least six in 10 young adults report being unemployed and looking for jobs (Figure 4). The situation is quite different in Seychelles (8%), where fewer than one in 10 youth are unemployed.

**Figure 4: Unemployed, looking for a job** | respondents aged 18-35 | 38 countries\* | 2021/2023



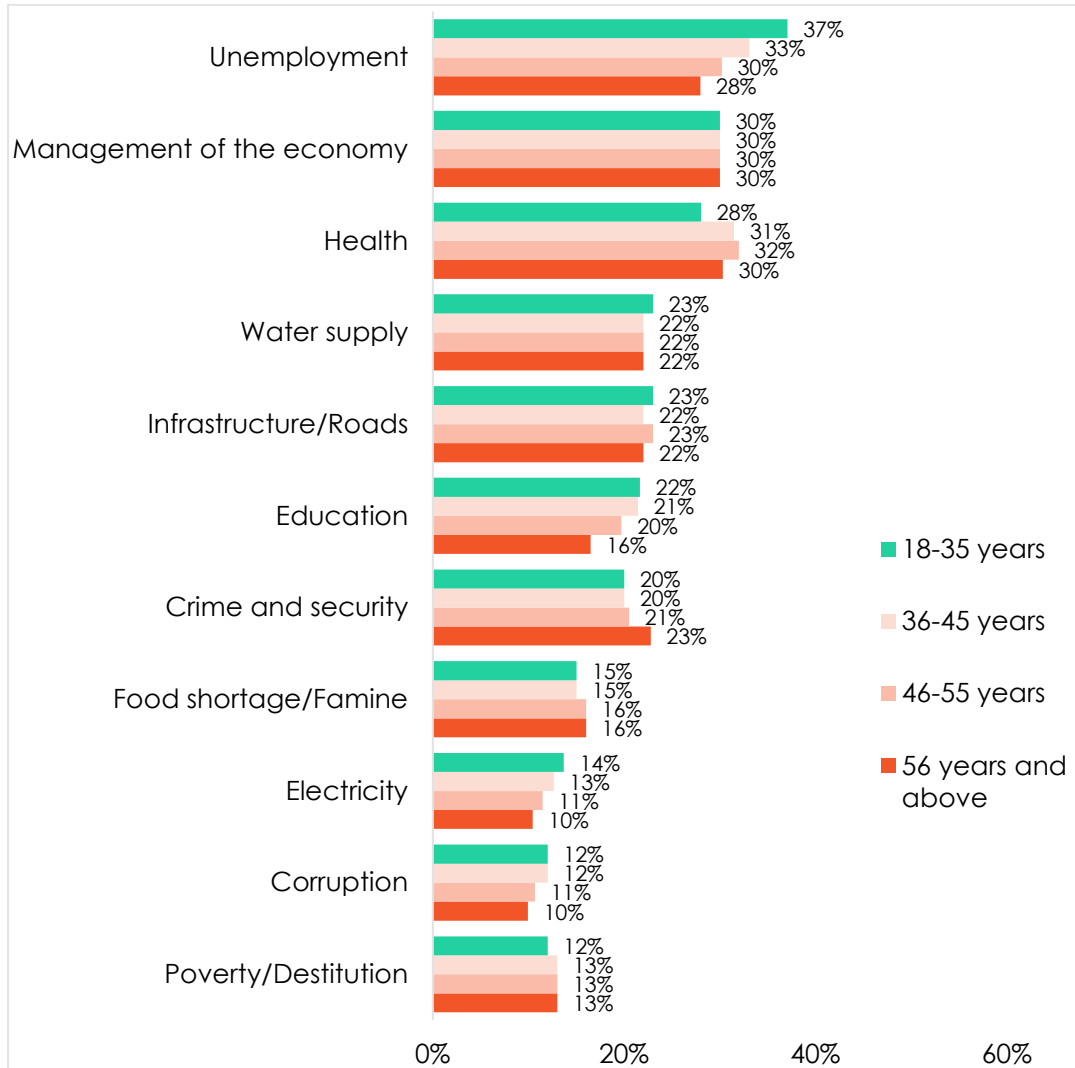
**Respondents were asked:** Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job? (% aged 18-35 who say “no, but looking”) (\* Employment data are not available for Mauritius.)

### Priorities for action

With so many young people struggling to find jobs, it comes as no surprise that unemployment tops the list of most important problems that young Africans want their

government to address (cited by 37% of respondents aged 18-35). The related problem of economic management ranks second (30%), followed by health (28%), water supply (23%), infrastructure/roads (23%), and education (22%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Most important problems | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



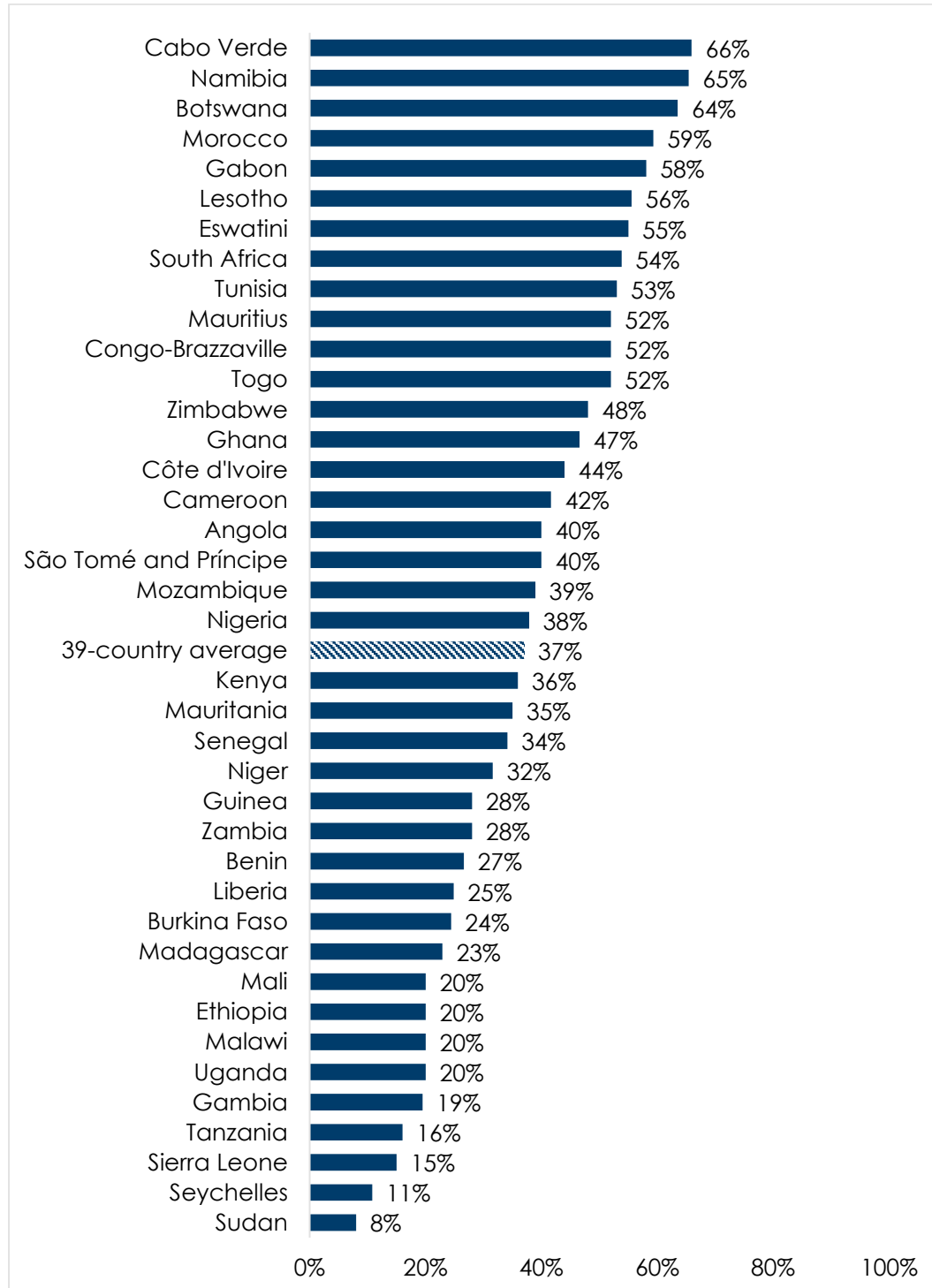
**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per respondent)*

While the youth are more likely than older groups to prioritise unemployment as their most important problem (37% vs. 28%-33%), they share similar views on most other policy priorities. Across all age groups, management of the economy as a policy priority rose sharply from the middle of the pack in previous survey rounds to almost tie with unemployment, displacing health to third position. The effects of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine may have informed this shift in policy priorities. Paraphrasing UN Assistant Secretary-General Ahunnah Eziakonwa, Sen (2022) captures the situation very well: "Russia's war in Ukraine has disrupted Africa's promising recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by raising food and fuel prices, disrupting trade of goods and services, tightening the fiscal space, constraining green transitions and reducing the flow of development finance in the continent."

At the country level, unemployment is a top policy priority for about two-thirds of young adults in Cabo Verde (66%), Namibia (65%), and Botswana (64%) (Figure 6). On the other

hand, very few young respondents in Sudan (8%), Seychelles (11%), and Sierra Leone (15%) rank unemployment as a top policy priority. Economic management is the highest policy priority for young people in Sudan (70%), Sierra Leone (50%), and Seychelles (43%).

**Figure 6: Unemployment as most important problem** | respondents aged 18-35  
 | 39 countries | 2021/2023

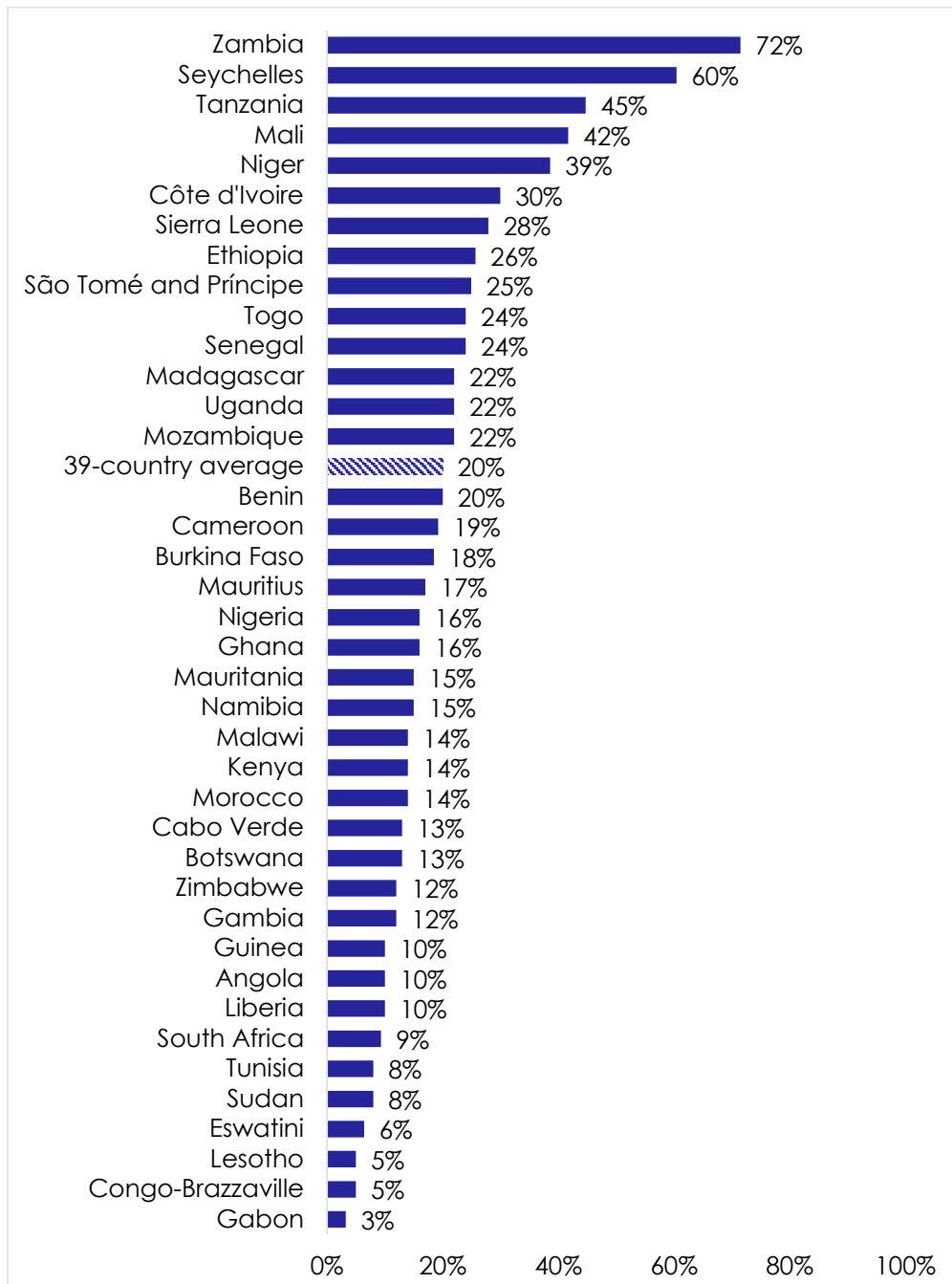


**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per respondent) (% who say "unemployment")

## Evaluation of government performance

On their top policy priority, most Africans rate their government's performance as poor. On average across 39 countries, only two in 10 citizens (20%) say their government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on job creation (Figure 7). Just two countries – Zambia (72%) and Seychelles (60%) – record majority approval, while satisfaction is vanishingly low in Gabon (3%), Congo-Brazzaville (5%), Lesotho (5%), and Eswatini (6%).

**Figure 7: Positive rating of government performance on job creation | 39 countries**  
 | 2021/2023

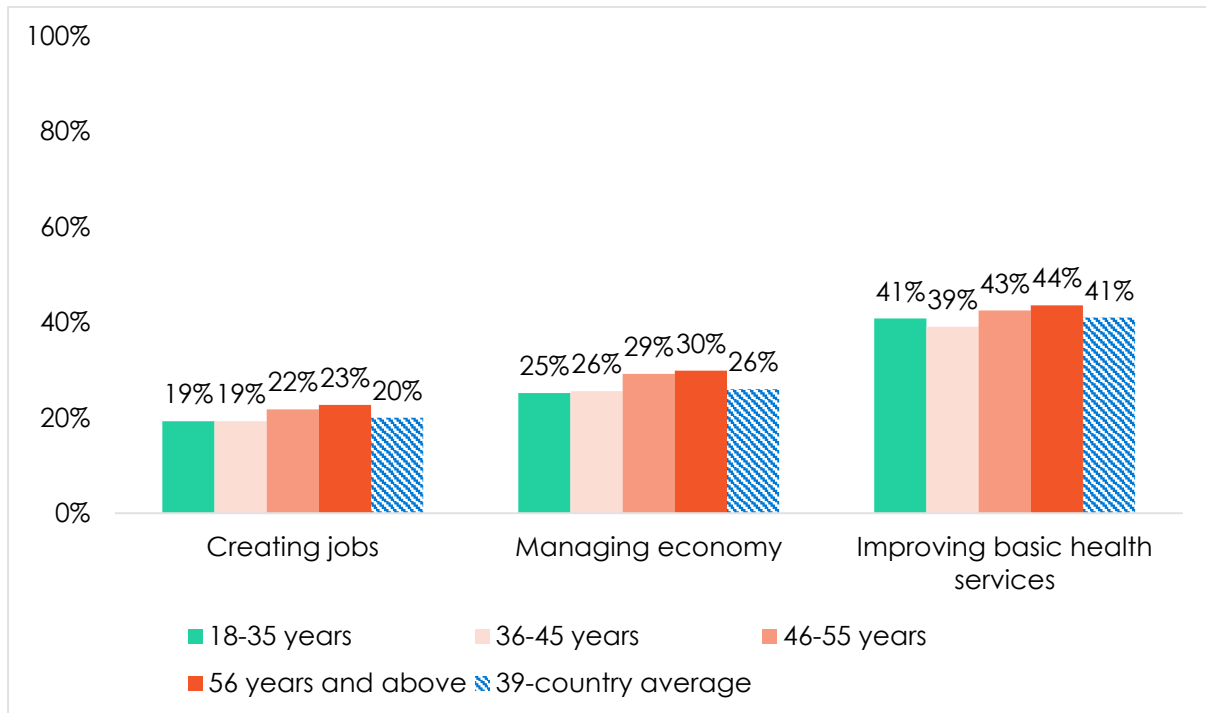


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Handling job creation? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")



Young Africans align with the general population in their evaluations of government performance on the most important problems they face. Only 19% approve of government efforts to create jobs, while 25% and 41%, respectively, are satisfied with the government's performance on economic management and improving basic health services (Figure 8). These assessments are close to the continental averages, though 3-5 percentage points lower than those offered by the oldest respondents.

**Figure 8: Approval of government performance on jobs, economy, and health**  
 | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023

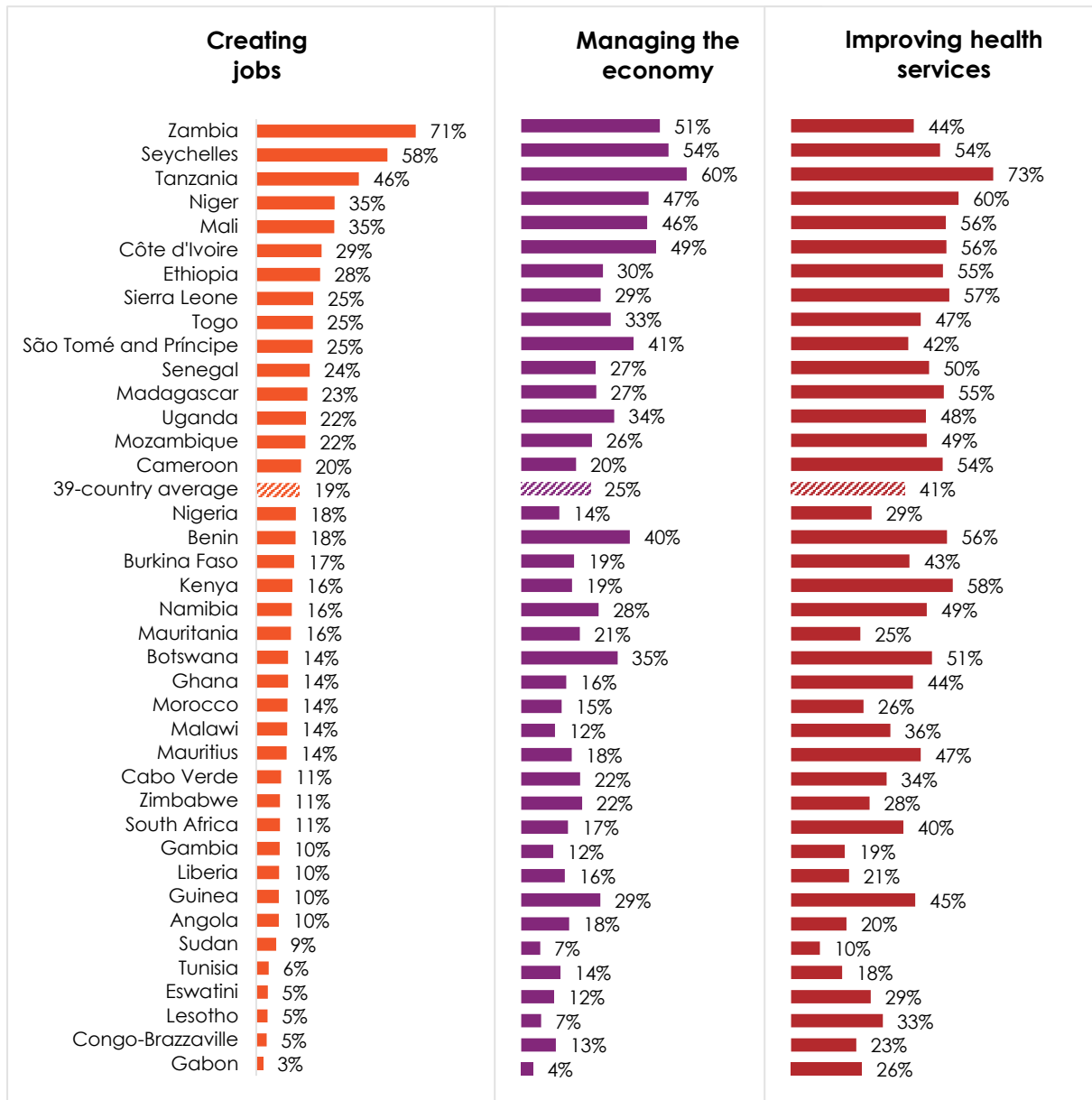


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

As shown in Figure 9, youth in Tanzania, Seychelles, and Zambia consistently give their government some of the best ratings on their top policy priorities, while their counterparts in Sudan, Gabon, Tunisia, Congo-Brazzaville, Lesotho, and Eswatini offer some of the least positive assessments.

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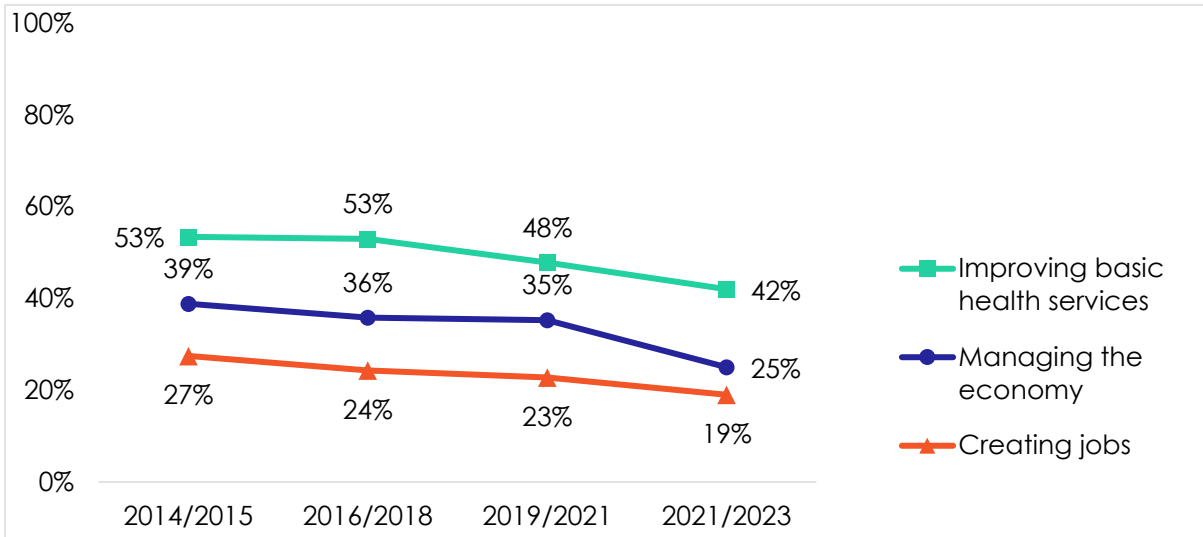
**Figure 9: Youth approval of government performance on jobs, economy, and health**  
| respondents aged 18-35 years | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**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")

Since 2014/2015, young people's ratings of their government's performance in addressing their top three policy priorities have declined significantly across 31 countries surveyed consistently in this period (Figure 10). Approval of efforts to reduce unemployment has dropped by 8 percentage points (from 27% to 19%), while approval of health-care delivery has seen a 9-point decline. We see the sharpest decline in governments' economic management, a 14-point drop from 39% to 25%.

**Figure 10: Youth approval of government performance on jobs, economy, and health** | respondents aged 18-35 years | 31 countries | 2014-2023



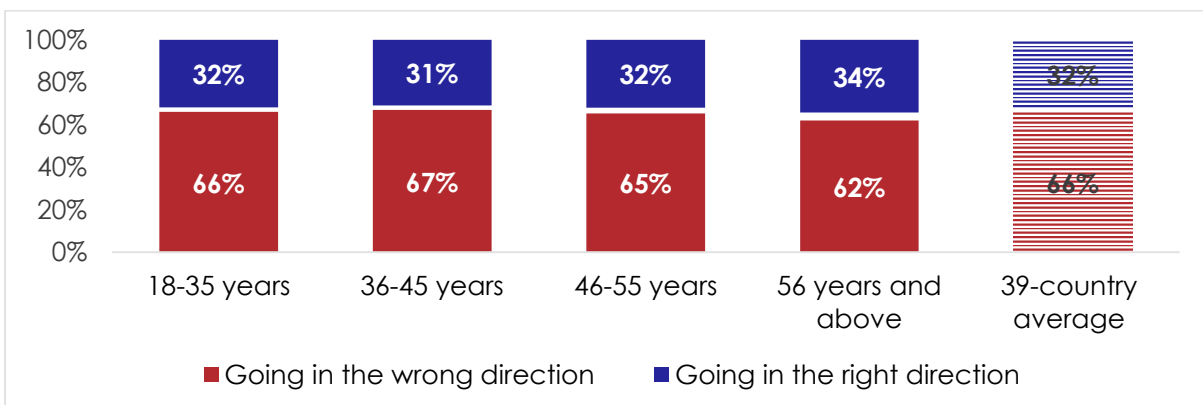
**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

### Views on country's direction and economic situation

The African Development Bank's (2023) African Economic Outlook 2023 paints a mixed picture for the continent. Notwithstanding a generally positive outlook on prospects for gross domestic product growth, the report notes that "Africa faces several downside risks to its growth prospects that call for cautious optimism. The tightening of global financial conditions and appreciation of the United States dollar have exacerbated debt service costs and could increase the risk of debt distress, especially for countries with severely constrained fiscal positions. ... This is in addition to climate change, which continues to threaten lives, livelihoods, and economic activities".

Citizens' views across 39 countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2021/2023 are consistent with these projections: On average, two-thirds (66%) of Africans say their country is heading in "the wrong direction," while only one-third (32%) see it as moving in "the right direction" (Figure 11). Africa's youth are slightly more pessimistic than the over-55 group about the direction of the country (66% vs. 62%).

**Figure 11: Country's direction** | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023

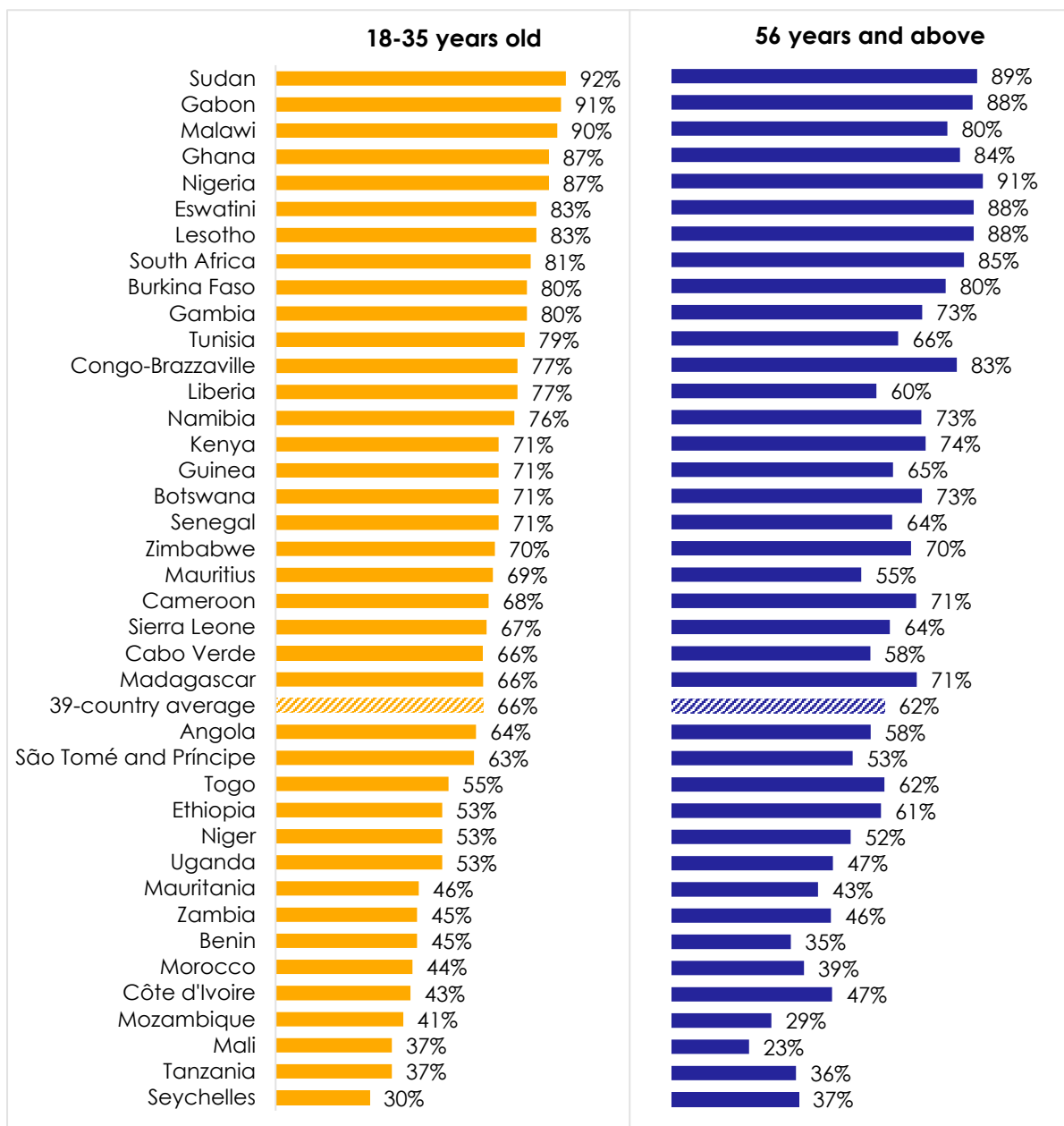


**Respondents were asked:** Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

In 21 of the 39 surveyed countries, young adults are significantly more pessimistic (by 3 percentage points or more) about the general direction of their country, with the largest gaps recorded in Liberia (a 17-percentage-point difference between the proportion of young adults and elder citizens who say the country is heading in the wrong direction), Mauritius (14 points), Mali (14 points), Tunisia (13 points), and Mozambique (12 points) (Figure 12).

In 12 countries, older citizens are more likely than the youth to share gloomy views about the direction of their countries. These include Ethiopia (by 8 percentage-points), Seychelles (7 points), Togo (7 points), and Congo-Brazzaville (6 points).

**Figure 12: Country is going in the wrong direction | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**

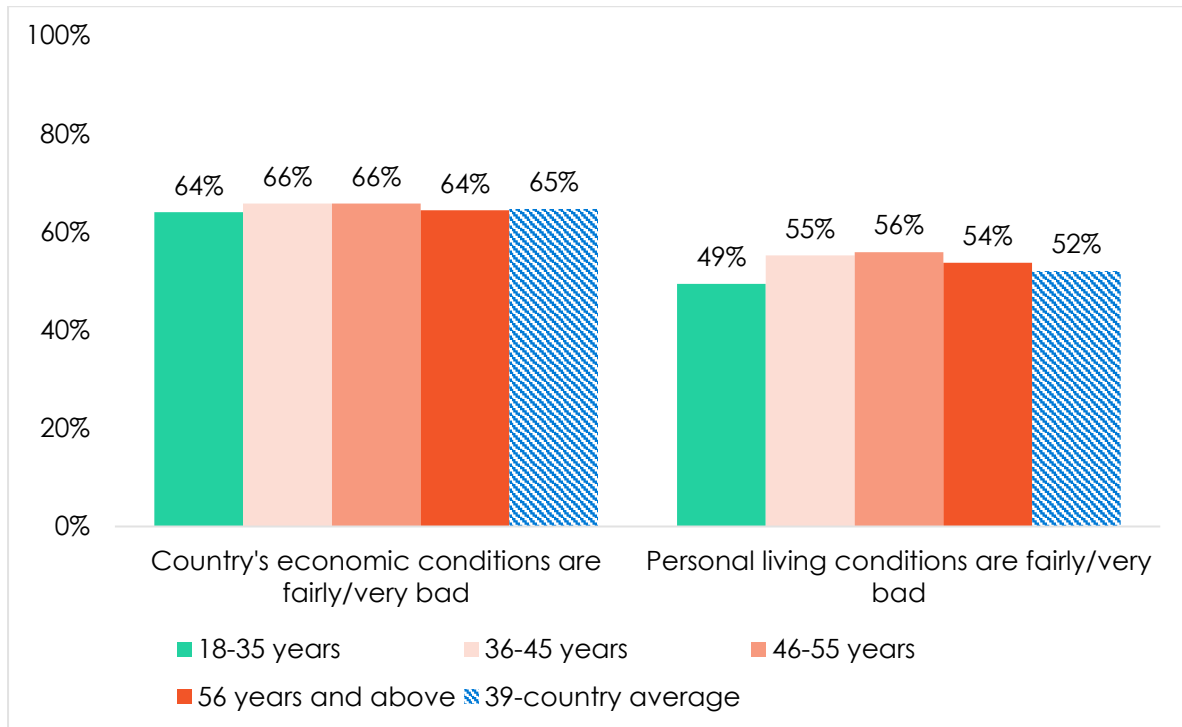


**Respondents were asked:** Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? (% who say "wrong direction")

In line with views of their country's direction, about two-thirds (65%) of Africans say its economic conditions are "fairly bad" or "very bad," an assessment that is shared across all age groups (Figure 13).

A slim majority (52%) of respondents also describe their personal living conditions as bad, though the youth (49%) are slightly less negative about their living conditions than their elders.

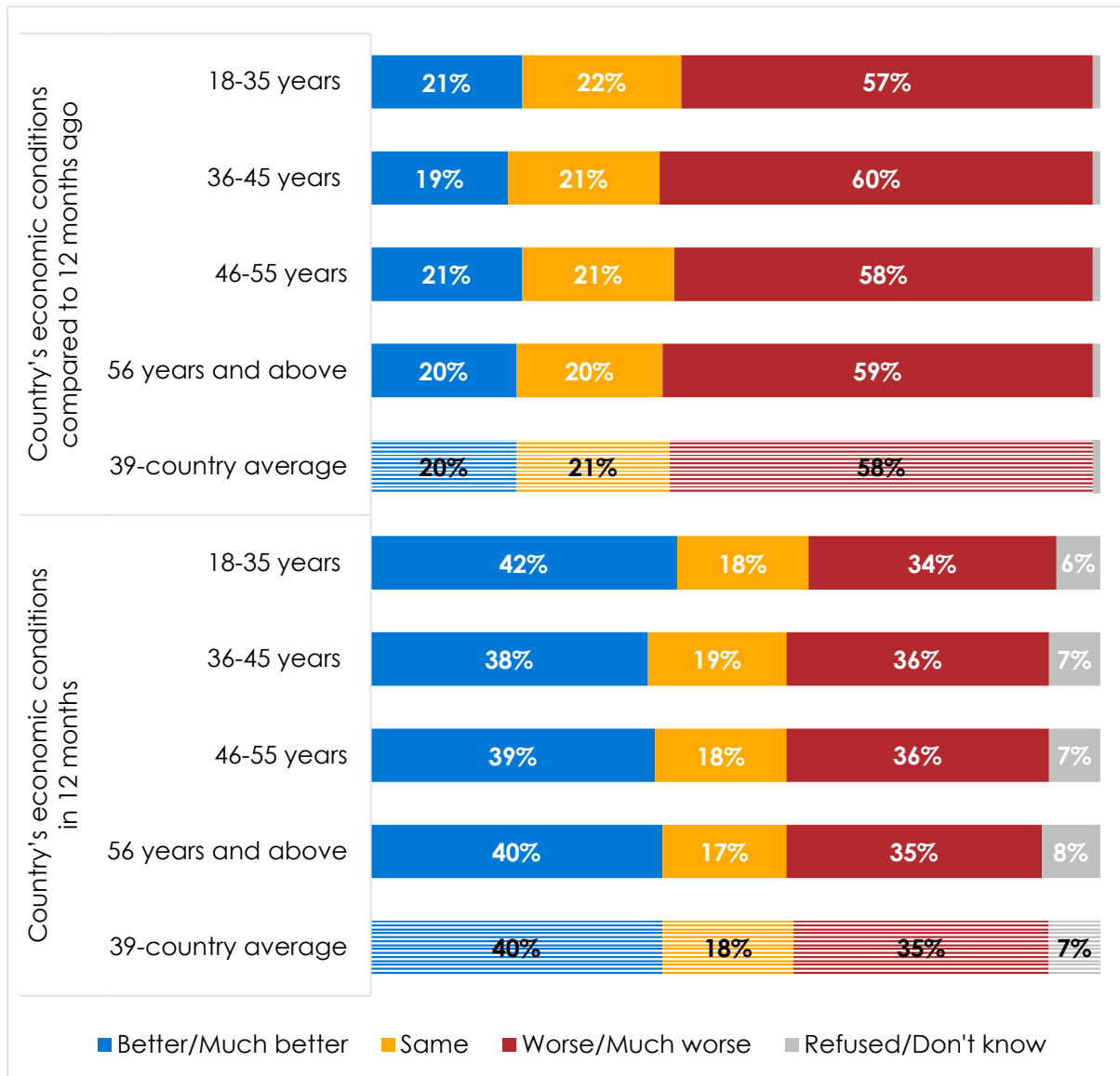
**Figure 13: Negative assessments of country's economic and personal living conditions** | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**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")

Looking back, only two in 10 young adults (21%) think their countries' economies have gotten better in the past 12 months (Figure 14). But optimism about the future is more robust: More than four in 10 young Africans (42%) expect economic conditions to get better in the next 12 months, a view that is also shared by their elders.

**Figure 14: Retrospective and prospective assessments of country's economic conditions** | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023

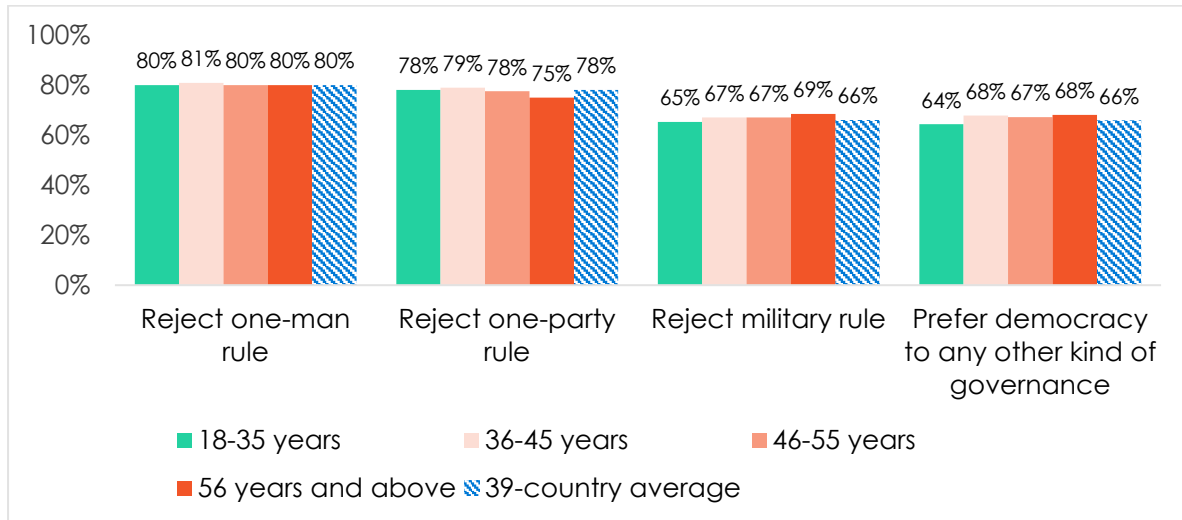


**Respondents were asked:** Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago? Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

### Attitudes toward democratic governance and institutions

The recent spike in military coups in West and Central Africa might suggest that democratic decline is gaining momentum on the continent. These headwinds notwithstanding, popular commitment to democracy and democratic norms remains strong. Across the 39 countries surveyed in 2021/2023, large majorities of Africans say they prefer democracy to any other form of government (66%) and reject authoritarian alternatives such as one-man rule (80%), one-party rule (78%), and military rule (66%) (Figure 15). Opposition to one-man rule and one-party rule is strong and consistent across all age groups. However, African youth are slightly less likely than those above age 55 to express a preference for democracy (64% vs. 68%) and to reject military rule (65% vs. 69%).

**Figure 15: Support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian rule | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**

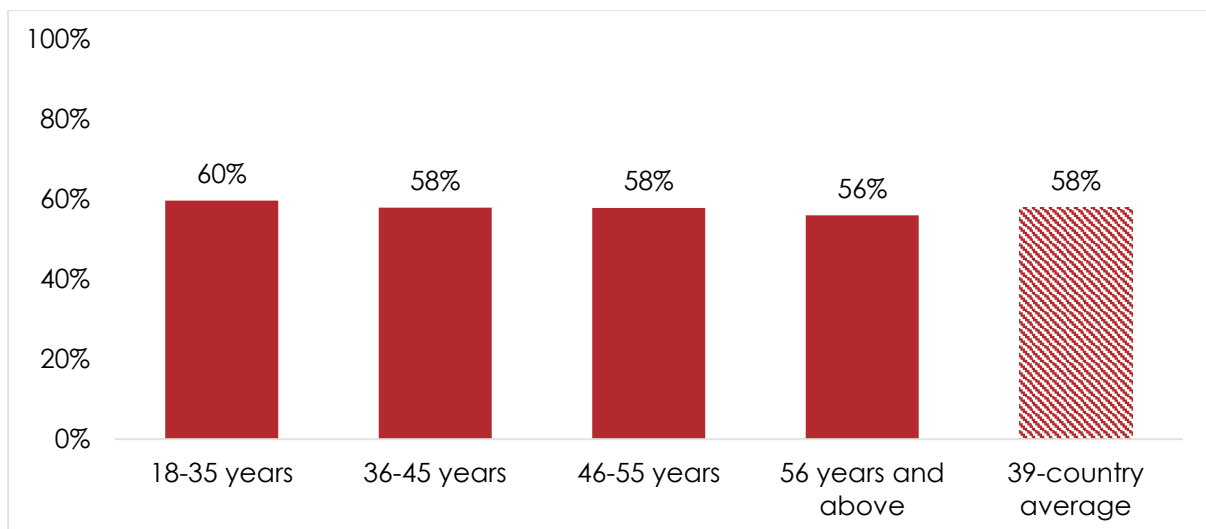


**Respondents were asked:**

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable. Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind government we have. (% who say democracy is preferable)  
 There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office? The army comes in to govern the country? Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything? (% who "disagree" or "strongly disagree")

While demand for democracy remains strong, the supply side – what citizens feel they're getting in terms of democracy – is far weaker. Nearly six in 10 Africans (58%) are dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their countries. Young adults are slightly more likely than those over age 55 to say they are "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied" with the way their democracy is functioning (60% vs. 56%) (Figure 16).

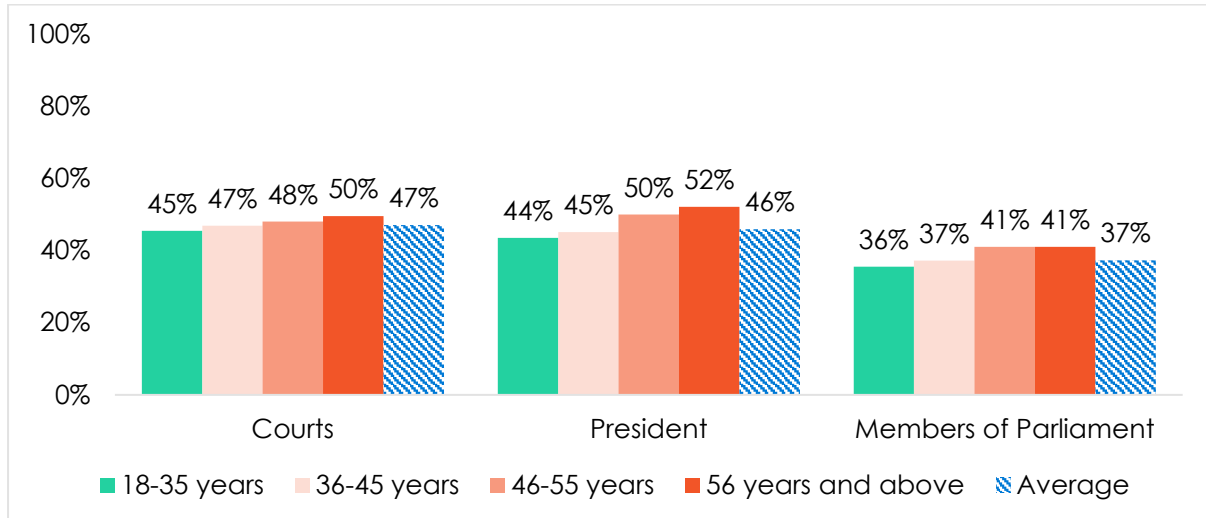
**Figure 16: Dissatisfaction with democracy | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**Respondents were asked:** Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country]? (% who say "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied")

African youth also express less trust in public institutions than older citizens. Only 44% of respondents aged 18-35 say they trust their president “somewhat” or “a lot,” compared to 52% among those aged 56 and above (Figure 17). Similarly, youth are less likely than seniors to trust the courts (45% vs. 50%) and members of Parliament (MPs) (36% vs. 41%).

**Figure 17: Trust in state institutions | by age group | 39 countries\* | 2021/2023**

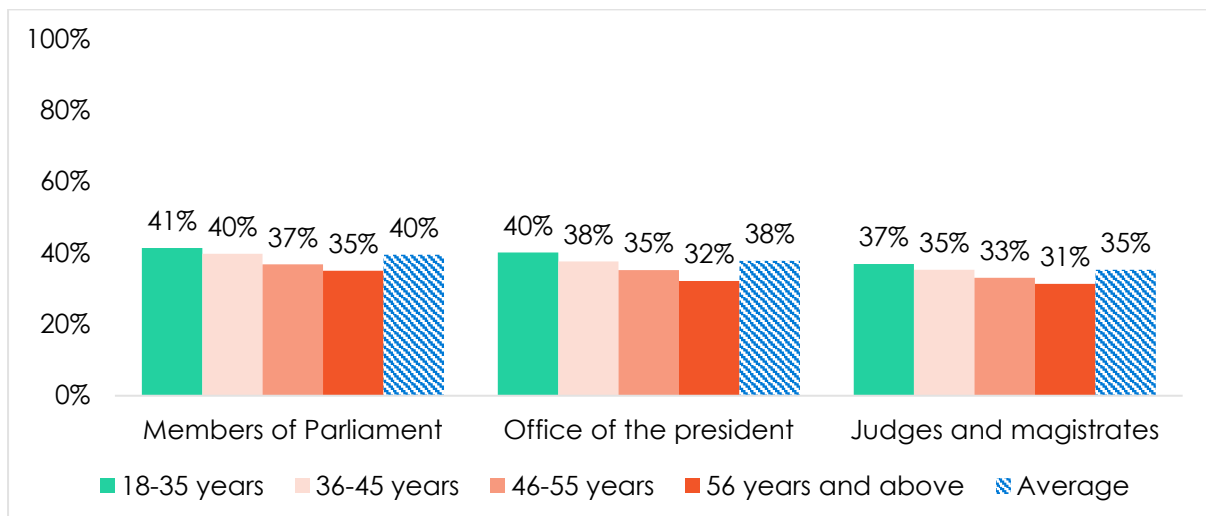


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

\* The question about trust in MPs was not asked in Guinea and Tunisia.

Perceptions of widespread corruption in public institutions are also higher among young Africans than among their elders (Figure 18). About four in 10 young Africans (41%) say “most” or “all” MPs are corrupt, compared to 35% of those aged 56 and above. This pattern is mirrored in perceptions of widespread corruption among officials at the Presidency (40% vs. 32%) and among judges and magistrates (37% vs. 31%).

**Figure 18: Perceived corruption in institutions | by age group | 39 countries\* | 2021/2023**



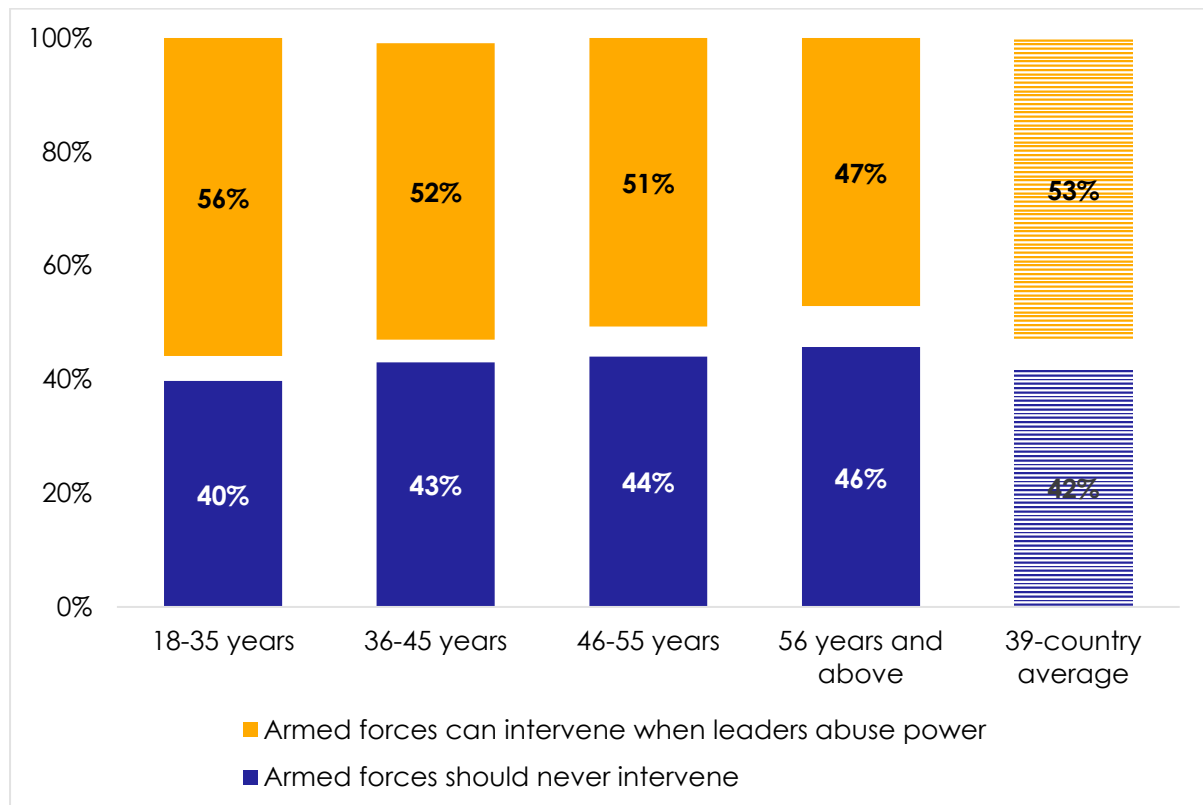
**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say “most of them” or “all of them”)

\* The question about corruption among MPs was not asked in Guinea, Sudan, and Tunisia.



The poor supply of democracy reflected in dissatisfaction with its functioning, perceived corruption, and weak trust may have contributed to some tolerance for military intervention. On average across 39 countries, a slim majority (53%) of adults say it is “legitimate for the armed forces to take control of government when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends.” Youth express the greatest willingness to tolerate military intervention if elected leaders abuse their power: 56% of 18- to 35-year-olds agree, vs. 51%-52% of the middle-aged and 47% of those aged 56 and above (Figure 19).

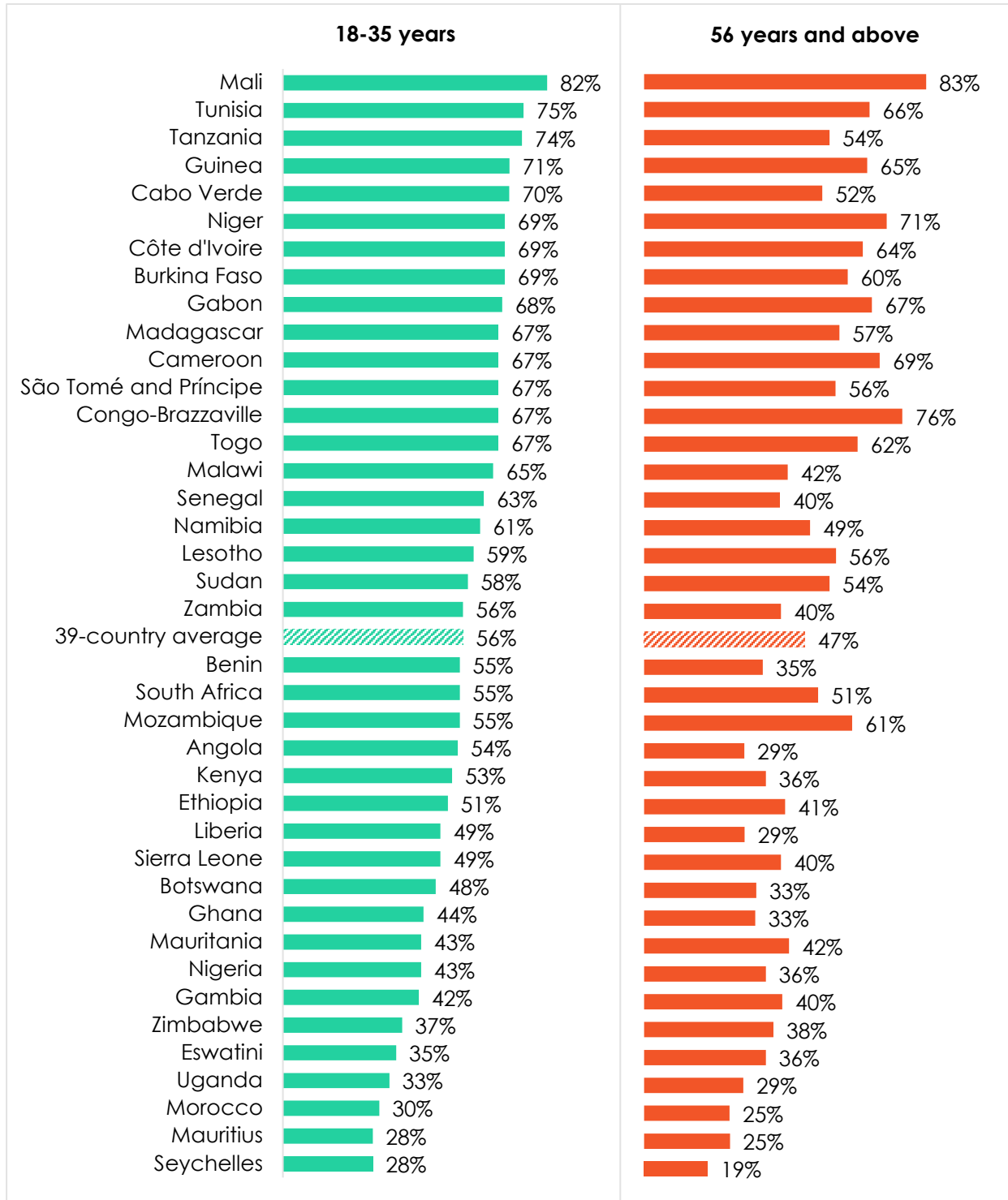
**Figure 19: Should military intervene when elected leaders abuse power? | by age group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: [Country]'s armed forces should never intervene in the country's political process.  
 Statement 2: It is legitimate for the armed forces to take control of government when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends.  
 (% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

Tolerance for military intervention is more widespread among the youth than the elders in 29 of the 39 surveyed countries, including huge gaps in Angola (25 percentage points), Malawi (23 points), Senegal (23 points), Tanzania (20 points), and Benin (20 points) (Figure 20). Congo-Brazzaville and Mozambique are the only countries where the elders are significantly more likely than the youth to accept military intervention if elected leaders abuse their power. Given the numerical strength of young people on the continent, these findings should be concerning to African governments and other governance and development stakeholders.

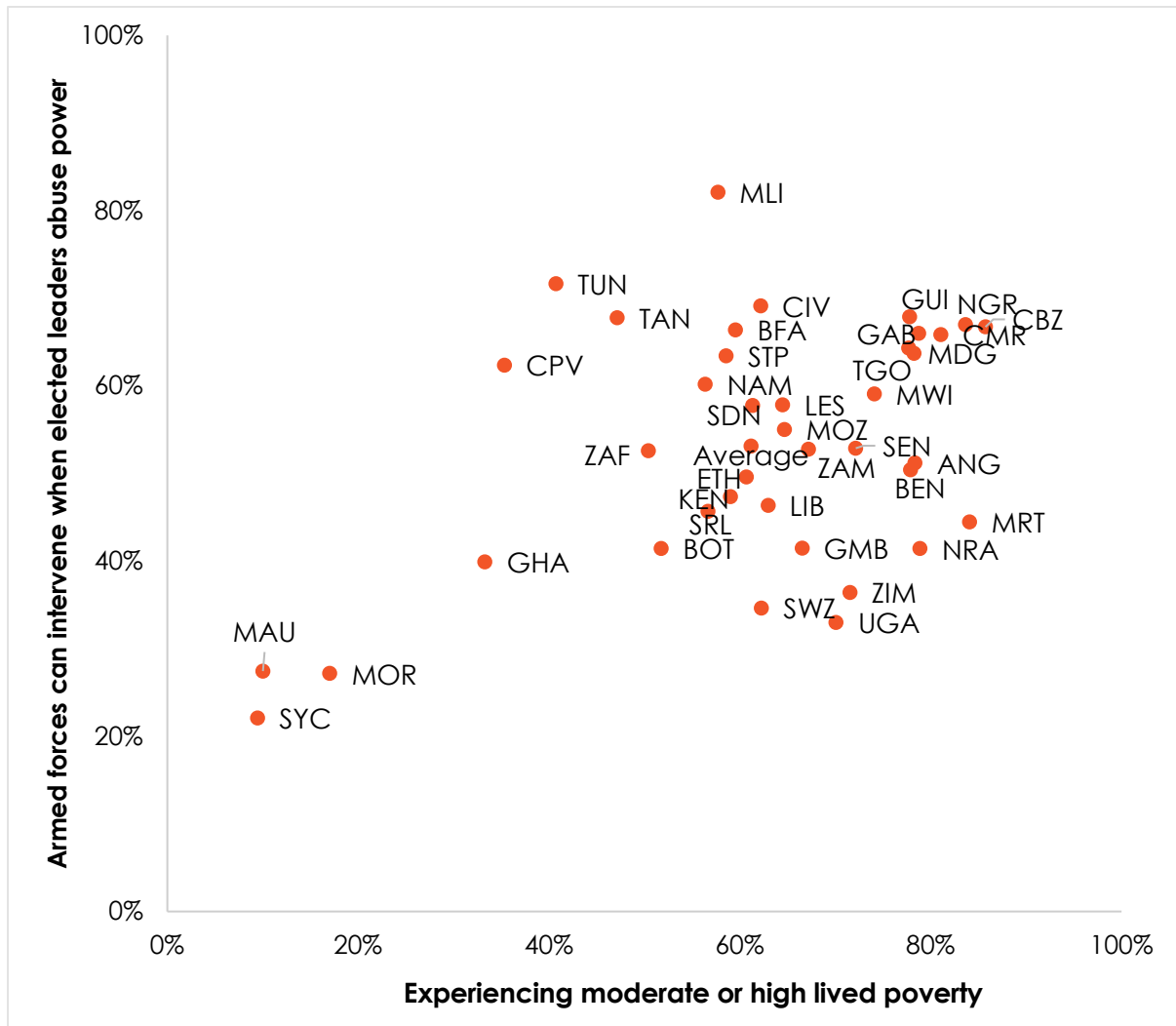
**Figure 20: Military can intervene if elected leaders abuse power** | by age group  
 | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: [Country]'s armed forces should never intervene in the country's political process.  
 Statement 2: It is legitimate for the armed forces to take control of government when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 2)

While the disappointing supply of democratic governance may have contributed to some willingness to accept military intervention, the data also show that economic factors play a role. In particular, the experience of poverty appears to correlate strongly with a tolerance for military intervention: As shown in Figure 21, countries with higher levels of lived poverty<sup>2</sup> tend to record greater acceptance of military intervention if elected leaders abuse their power.

**Figure 21: Lived poverty and tolerance for military intervention** | 39 countries  
 | 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:**

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?

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: [Country]'s armed forces should never intervene in the country's political process.

Statement 2: It is legitimate for the armed forces to take control of government when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends. (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 2)

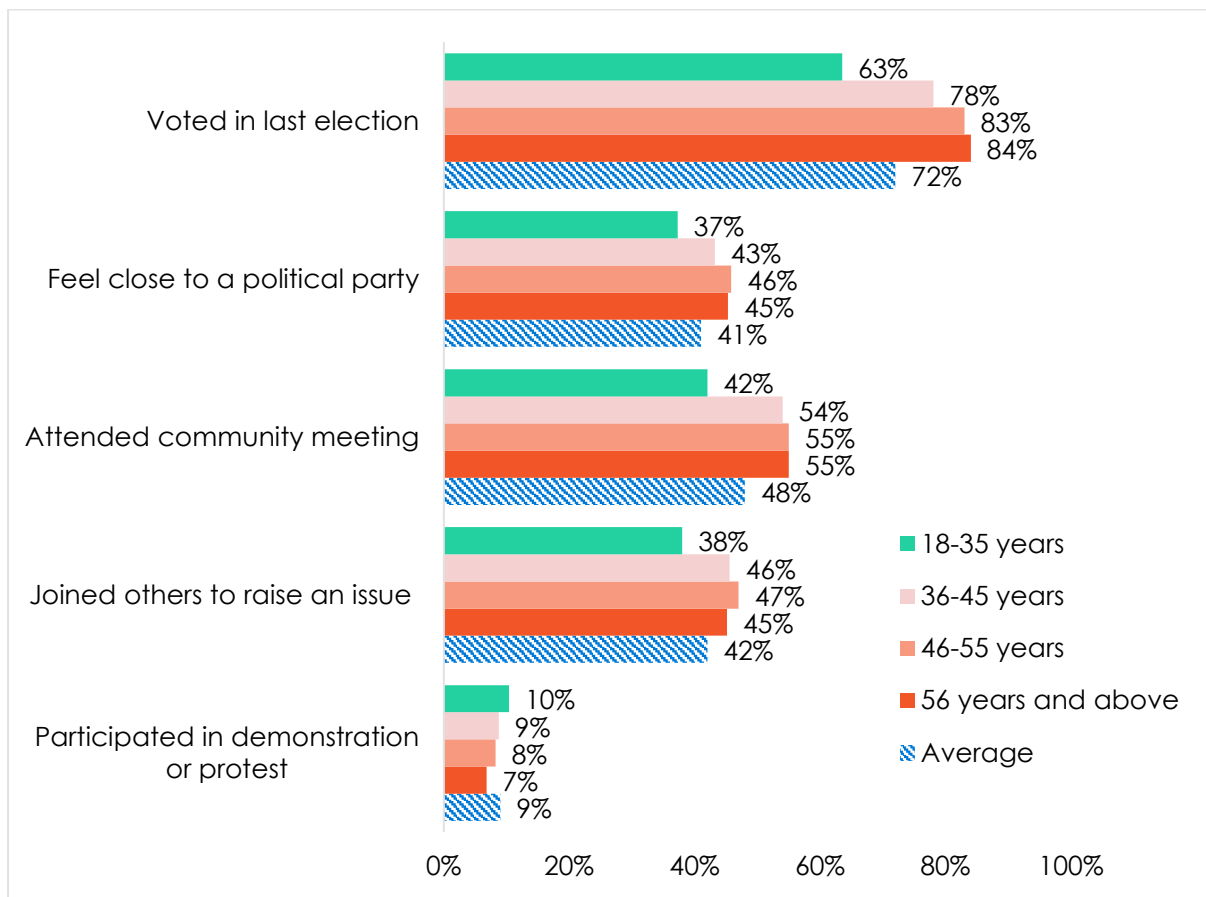
<sup>2</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

## Participation in change-making activities

Even though African youth are more dissatisfied than their elders about the state of democratic governance in their countries, they tend to be less engaged in activities that might produce change (Figure 22). One large gap in political engagement concerns the basic act of voting in elections. Fewer than two-thirds (63%) of the youth who were old enough to vote in their country's most recent national election say they did so, compared to 78%, 83%, and 84% of the older cohorts.

Similarly, young adults are less likely to report having attended a community meeting (42%, vs. 54%-55% of the older groups) and having joined others to raise an issue (38%, vs. 45%-47%) during the previous year. They are also less likely than their elders to identify with political parties (37%, vs. 43%-46%). The youth outstrip the over-55 cohort slightly when it comes to participating in demonstrations or protest marches during the previous 12 months (10% vs. 7%).

**Figure 22: Political participation** | by age group | 39 countries\* | 2021/2023



**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")*

\* The question about feeling close to a political party was not asked in Eswatini.

The pattern of less political engagement by youth is particularly pronounced among young women. As shown in Table 1, young African women are less likely than their male counterparts to vote (60% vs. 66%), to feel close to a political party (34% vs. 41%), to attend a community meeting (36% vs. 49%), to join others to raise an issue (32% vs. 45%), and to participate in a demonstration (8% vs. 13%).

Economic status appears to matter in youth political engagement. Poorer African youth are more likely than the well-off to be politically affiliated (40% among those experiencing high lived poverty vs. 27% among those with no lived poverty), to attend a community meeting (48% vs. 27%), and to join others to raise issues (43% vs. 30%). But the likelihood of voting or participating in a demonstration is about the same, irrespective of their economic status.

**Table 1: Political participation** | respondents aged 18-35 by demographic group | 39 countries\* | 2021/2023

	Voted in last election	Feel close to a political party	Attended community meeting	Joined others to raise an issue	Participated in demonstration or protest
<b>No lived poverty</b>	63%	27%	27%	30%	10%
<b>Low lived poverty</b>	63%	37%	38%	35%	10%
<b>Moderate lived poverty</b>	63%	38%	46%	41%	10%
<b>High lived poverty</b>	65%	40%	48%	43%	11%
<b>Men</b>	66%	41%	49%	45%	13%
<b>Women</b>	60%	34%	36%	32%	8%
<b>No formal education</b>	70%	39%	51%	37%	8%
<b>Primary</b>	65%	40%	50%	39%	9%
<b>Secondary</b>	61%	38%	40%	37%	10%
<b>Post-secondary</b>	61%	32%	35%	41%	13%
<b>Urban</b>	59%	32%	32%	35%	11%
<b>Rural</b>	67%	42%	53%	41%	10%

**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")*

\* The question about feeling close to a political party was not asked in Eswatini.

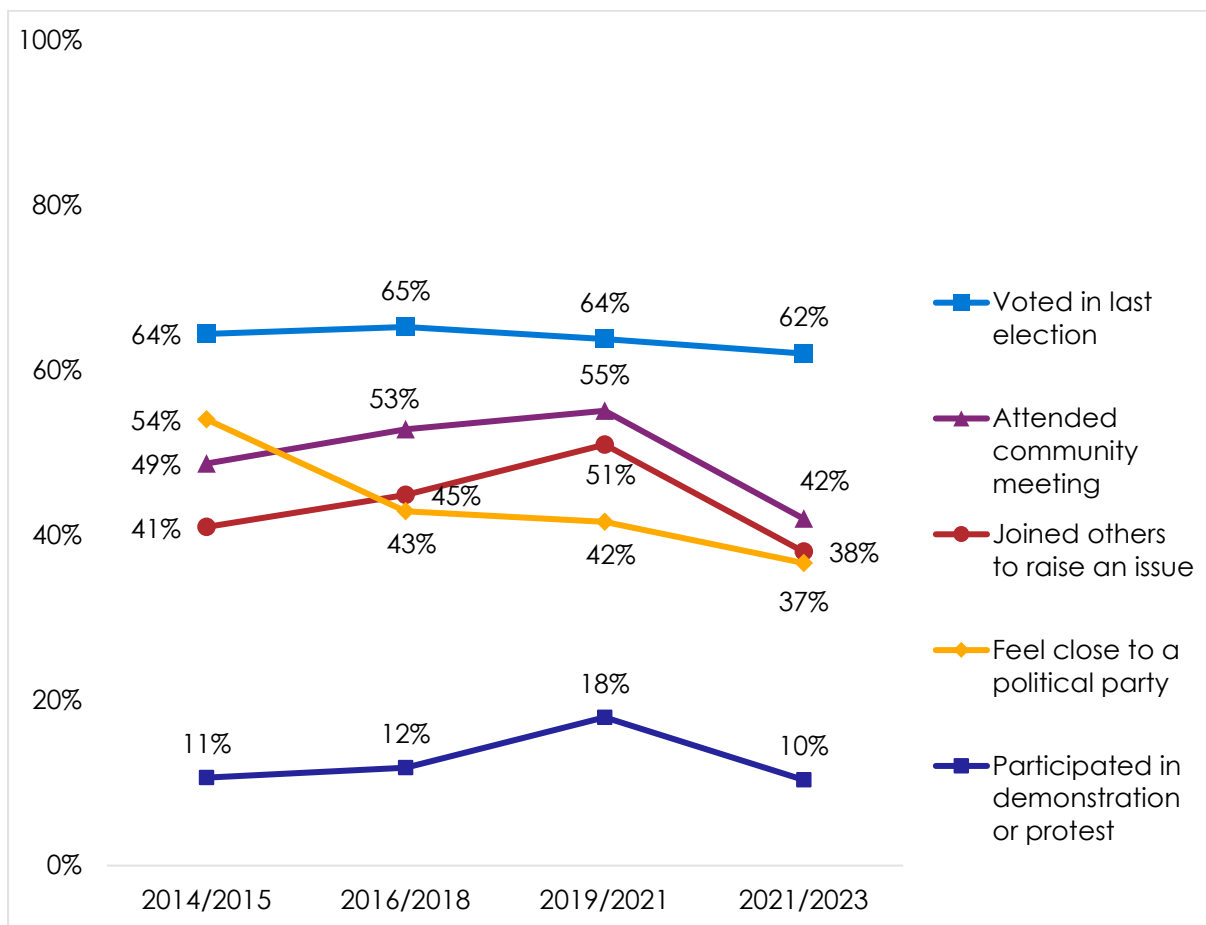
Voting, attending community meetings, and political party affiliation decrease as young respondents' level of education increases, showing gaps of 6-9 percentage points between those with no formal schooling and those with post-secondary qualifications. But the most

educated young adults are more likely than those with low or no education to participate in demonstrations (13% vs. 8%-9%).

Rural youth outstrip urban youth in all these forms of political participation with the exception of participating in demonstrations.

Over the past decade, there has been a sharp decline in young Africans' political party affiliation (-17 percentage points across 31 countries surveyed consistently), though self-reported voting has held fairly steady. Attendance at community meetings has also decreased, by 7 percentage points (Figure 23). Their likelihood of joining others to raise an issue and of participating in a demonstration or protest both increased significantly between 2014/2015 and 2019/2021 but has since reverted to roughly the levels recorded in 2014/2015.

**Figure 23: Political participation** | respondents aged 18-35 | 31 countries\*  
 | 2014-2023



**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")*

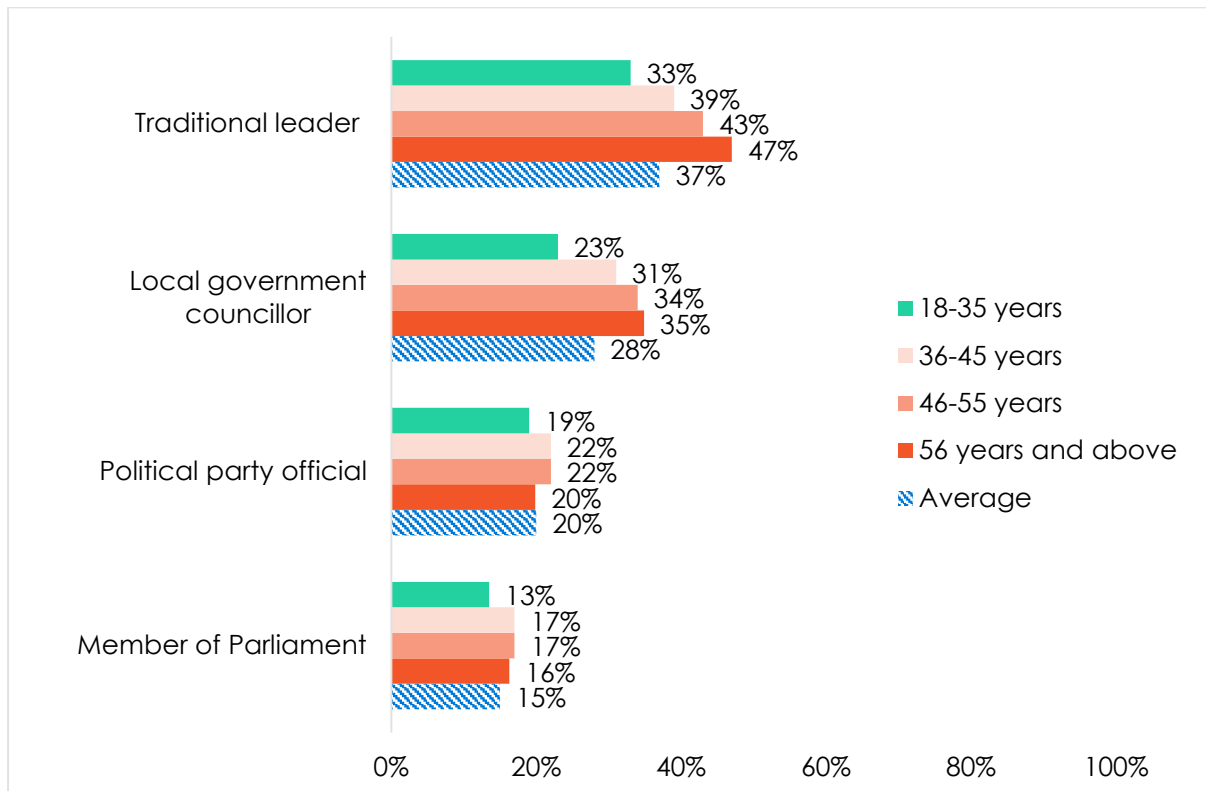
\* The question about voting was not asked in Senegal in Round 6.

\* The question about feeling close to a political party was not asked in Eswatini.

Another form of engagement in which youth trail the older generations is contact with leaders and representatives (Figure 24). A third (33%) of young respondents say they contacted a traditional leader during the previous year, compared to 39%-43% of the middle-aged and nearly half (47%) of those above age 55.

Not quite one-fourth (23%) of youth report contacting a local government councillor, again short of contact rates for their elders (31%-35%). Interaction with an MP was slightly less frequent among young people (13%) than among the older cohorts (16%-17%), while contact rates with political party officials were similar across age groups (19%-22%).

**Figure 24: Contacted leaders during the previous year | by age group**  
 | 39 countries\* | 2021/2023



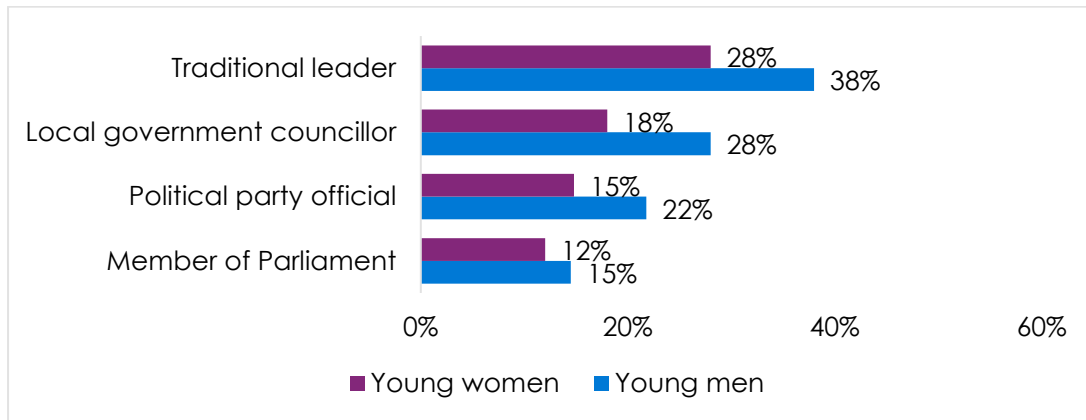
**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")

\* The question about MPs was not asked in Guinea and Sudan. The question about local government councillors was not asked in Liberia, Malawi, and Sudan. The question about political party officials was not asked in Eswatini. The question about traditional leaders was not asked in Cabo Verde, Mauritius, and Tunisia.

Gender gaps persist with respect to youth engagement with local leaders. Young women are less likely than their male counterparts to contact traditional leaders (28% vs. 38%), local government councillors (18% vs. 28%), political party officials (15% vs. 22%), and MPs (12% vs. 15%) (Figure 25).

Although young Africans' rates of contact with leaders are lower than those of their elders, they have shown steady growth over the past decade (Figure 26). Across 31 countries surveyed consistently between 2014/2015 and 2021/2023, contact by young Africans saw increases of 6 percentage points for traditional leaders, 5 points for local government councillors, 4 points for political party officials, and a marginal 2 points for MPs.

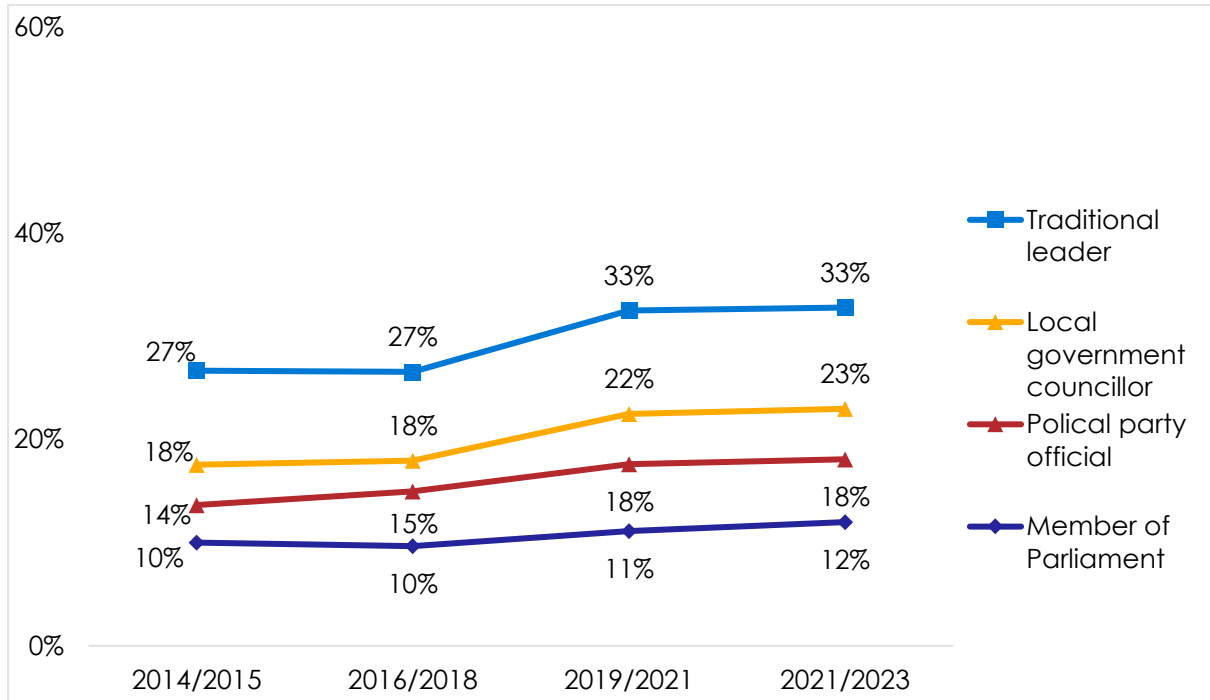
**Figure 25: Contacted political representatives during previous year** | respondents aged 18-35 by gender | 39 countries\* | 2021/2023



**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")

\* The question about MPs was not asked in Guinea and Sudan. The question about local government councillors was not asked in Liberia, Malawi, and Sudan. The question about political party officials was not asked in Eswatini. The question about traditional leaders was not asked in Cabo Verde, Mauritius, and Tunisia.

**Figure 26: Contacted leaders during the previous year** | respondents aged 18-35 | 31 countries\* | 2014-2023



**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")

\* The question about MPs was not asked in Guinea and Sudan. The question about local government councillors was not asked in Liberia, Malawi, and Sudan. The question about political party officials was not asked in Eswatini. The question about traditional leaders was not asked in Cabo Verde, Mauritius, and Tunisia.



## Conclusion

Despite being more educated than their elders, young Africans find it harder to get a job. Unemployment is their top priority for government action, followed by the related problem of economic management, and on both issues, overwhelming majorities in most countries see their government as failing.

In their assessments of their country's overall direction and economic conditions, African youth are about as gloomy as the older generations, although optimists outnumber pessimists when it comes to expectations for the coming year.

Young Africans join their elders in expressing a strong preference for democracy and rejection of authoritarian alternatives, including military rule. But they are even more pronounced than older cohorts in their dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in their country as well as their perceptions of widespread corruption and their mistrust of institutions and leaders. And they express a greater willingness to tolerate military takeovers if elected leaders abuse their power – a worrying finding considering their numerical strength.

African youth are also considerably less engaged than their elders in civic and political activities that could spur change, including voting in elections. One encouraging trend is a steady increase in young people's contact with local leaders – a fitting forum for the political establishment to meet the youth – and engage them – where they are.

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## Appendix

**Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 9 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds**

Country	Round 9 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Angola	Feb.-March 2022	2019
Benin	Jan. 2022	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2020
Botswana	June-July 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Burkina Faso	Sept.-Oct. 2022	2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019
Cabo Verde	July-Aug. 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2019
Cameroon	March 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Congo-Brazzaville	June-July 2023	NA
Côte d'Ivoire	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2013, 2014, 2017, 2019
Eswatini	Oct.-Nov. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Ethiopia	May-June 2023	2013, 2020
Gabon	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2015, 2017, 2020
Gambia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2018, 2021
Ghana	April 2022	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Guinea	Aug. 2022	2013, 2015, 2017, 2019
Kenya	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2019
Lesotho	Feb.-March 2022	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2020
Liberia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2020
Madagascar	April-May 2022	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2018
Malawi	Feb. 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Mali	July 2022	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020
Mauritania	Nov. 2022	NA
Mauritius	March 2022	2012, 2014, 2017, 2020
Morocco	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Mozambique	Oct.-Nov. 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021
Namibia	Oct.-Nov. 2021	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Niger	June 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2020
Nigeria	March 2022	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020
São Tomé and Príncipe	Dec. 2022	2015, 2018
Senegal	May-June 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2021
Seychelles	Dec. 2022	NA
Sierra Leone	June-July 2022	2012, 2015, 2018, 2020
South Africa	Nov.-Dec. 2022	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018, 2021
Sudan	Nov.-Dec. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Tanzania	Sept.-Oct. 2022	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021
Togo	March 2022	2012, 2014, 2017, 2021
Tunisia	Feb.-March 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2020
Uganda	Jan. 2022	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019
Zambia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020
Zimbabwe	March-April 2022	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, Luminare, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and GIZ.

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 734 | 15 November 2023**