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Mauritian youth see jobs, crime, and economy as top priorities for government attention

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 772 | Asafika Mpako and Suhaylah Peeraullee

Summary

The Global Youth Development Index ranks Mauritius as a “high youth development” country, 54th in the world and No. 1 in Africa in promoting youth education, employment, health, equality and inclusion, peace and security, and political and civic participation (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021).

Yet according to Statistics Mauritius (2023), more than one-third (35%) of Mauritians outside the labour force in the first quarter of 2023 were aged 16-24, reflecting youth unemployment that is about triple the national average (20% vs. 6.7%).

Mauritius' National Youth Policy, which defines “youth” as persons between the ages of 14 and 35 years, promotes a holistic view of youth development, in line with the aspirations of the African Youth Charter (Republic of Mauritius, 2016; UNFPA, 2012). The government has implemented a variety of initiatives to promote youth employment, most notably the Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP), which aims to bridge the gap between education and the labour market by equipping unemployed young people with skills training through professional placement (Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, 2022).

How do Mauritian youth experience their own development?

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that unemployment is the most important problem that young Mauritians want their government to address, followed by crime/insecurity and management of the economy.

Few young Mauritians believe their government is doing an adequate job on economic issues or job creation, and many disapprove of the job performance of their elected leaders. Findings also suggest that youth in the country could make better use of the political and civic avenues available to them to ensure that their voices and priorities are heard.

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. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by Straconsult Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Mauritians in March 2022. 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 Mauritius in 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

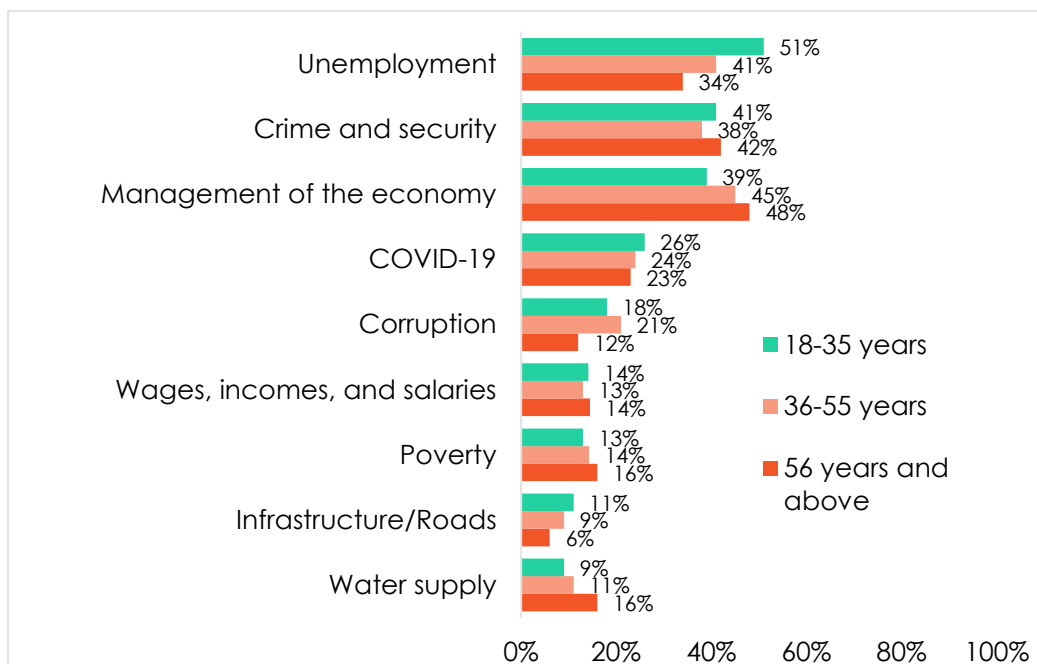
Key findings

- Unemployment, insecurity, and management of the economy are the most important problems that Mauritian youth (aged 18-35 years) want their government to address. They are significantly more likely than their elders to prioritise job creation.
- Mauritian youth have more education than their elders. Almost all young Mauritians (96%) have secondary or post-secondary schooling, compared to 79% in the 36-55 age group and 47% in the over-55 cohort.
- Only a small minority of young Mauritians say the government is doing a good job of addressing unemployment (14%), reducing crime (18%), managing the economy (18%), improving the living standards of the poor (18%), and fighting corruption (16%).
- Fewer than half of youth approve of the performance of their prime minister (46%), president (23%), National Assembly member (35%), and municipal or district councillor (47%).
- Only 46% of Mauritian youth describe their personal living conditions as “fairly good” or “very good,” while 33% say they are “fairly bad” or “very bad.”
- Young Mauritians are less likely than their elders to vote in elections, contact political leaders, join others to raise an issue, and attend community meetings.

Most important problems

Jobs top the youth agenda in Mauritius. More than half (51%) of 18- to 35-year-olds cite unemployment as one of their three highest priorities for government action, compared to 34%-41% of their elders (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Most important problems | by age group | Mauritius | 2022



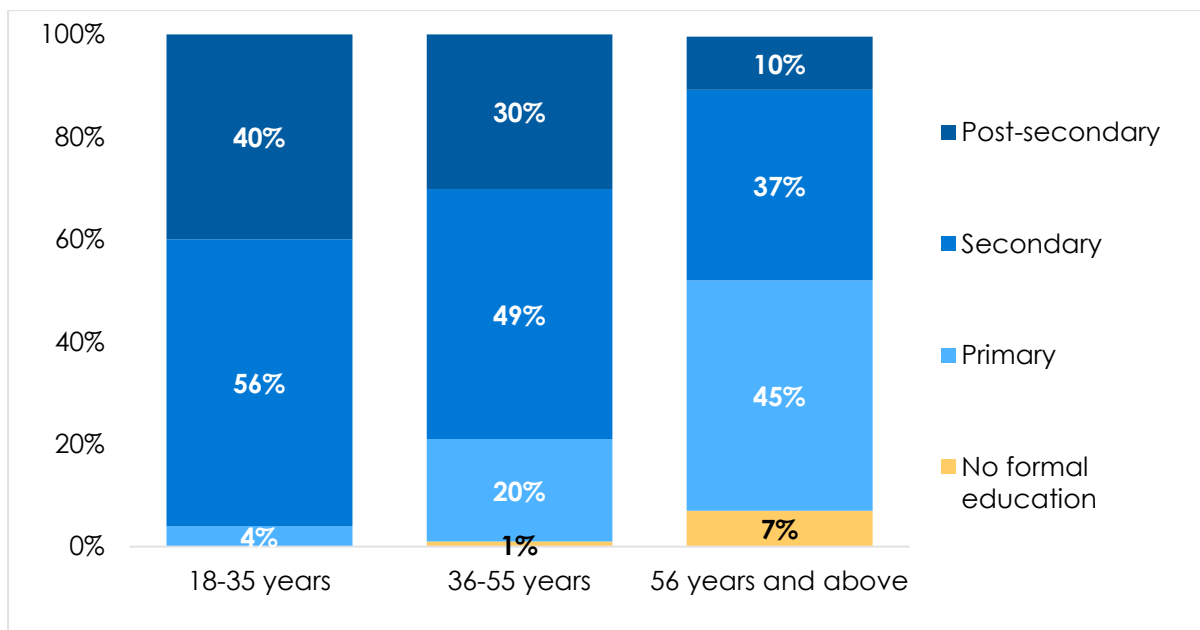
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three answers per respondent. The figure shows the % of respondents who cite each problem among their three priorities.)

Crime/security (41%) ranks second among the most important problems that young Mauritians want their government to address, followed by management of the economy (39%). At the time of the survey (March 2022), 26% mentioned COVID-19 as a top-tier problem, while 18% cited corruption (18%).

Is the government meeting the needs of Mauritius' youth?

Young Mauritians have significantly more education than their elders. Almost all 18- to 35-year-olds (96%) have secondary or post-secondary schooling, compared to 79% of 36- to 55-year-olds and 47% of the over-55 age group (Figure 2). Fewer than 1% of youth lack formal education altogether, compared to 7% of senior respondents.

Figure 2: Education level | by age group | Mauritius | 2022



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

But on their top priorities for government action, young Mauritians say the government is failing (Figure 3). Fewer than one in five young respondents say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" on creating jobs (14%), reducing crime (18%), and managing the economy (18%).

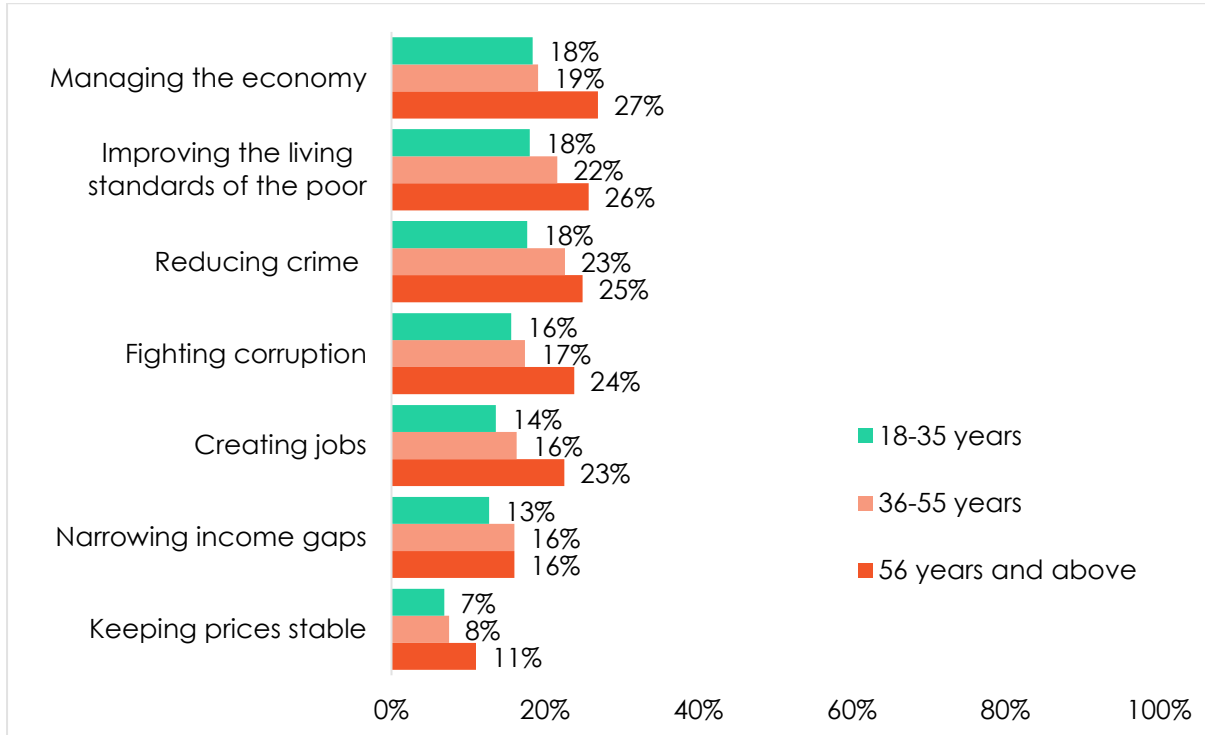
Similarly, only small minorities praise the government's efforts on improving the living standards of the poor (18%), fighting corruption (16%), narrowing income gaps (13%), and keeping prices stable (7%).

On each of these issues, young respondents are more negative in their appraisals of the government's performance than the oldest cohort, with gaps reaching 9 percentage points on management of the economy and job creation.

Moreover, fewer than half of young Mauritians "approve" or "strongly approve" of the performance of their political leaders, including Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth (46%), President Prithviraj Roopun (23%), their National Assembly member (35%), and their elected municipal or district councillor (47%) (Figure 4).

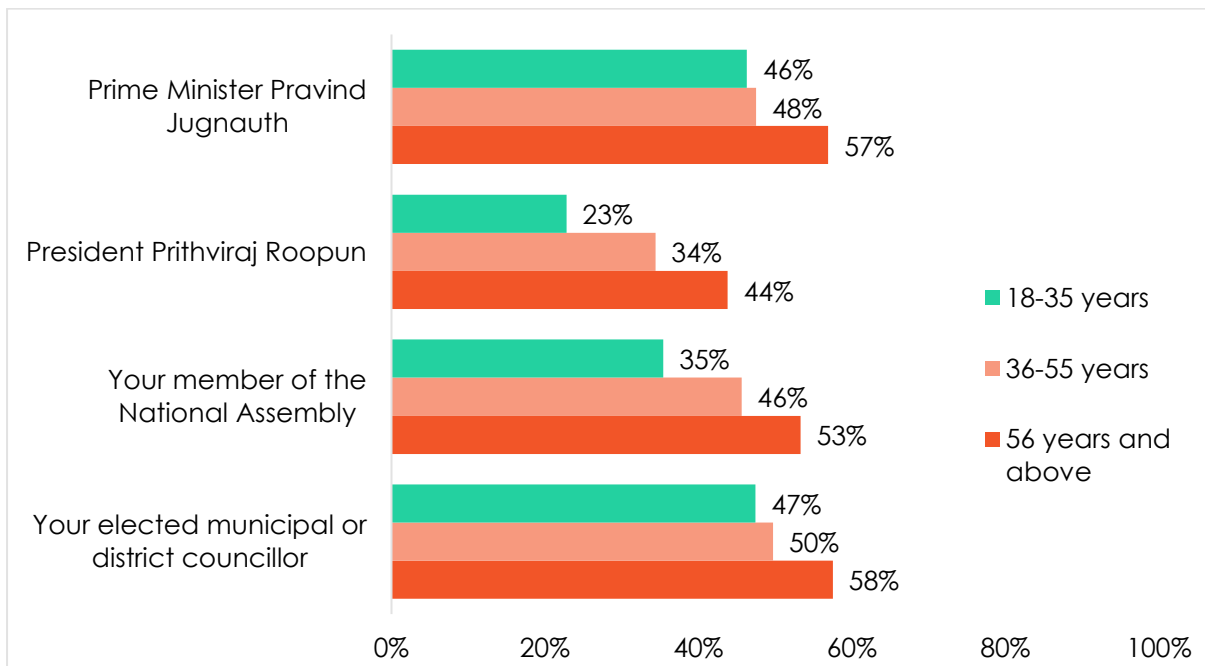
Again young respondents are more critical than their elders, with gaps of 11 to 21 percentage points in comparison to those over age 55.

Figure 3: Government performance on youth priorities | by age group
 | Mauritius | 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")

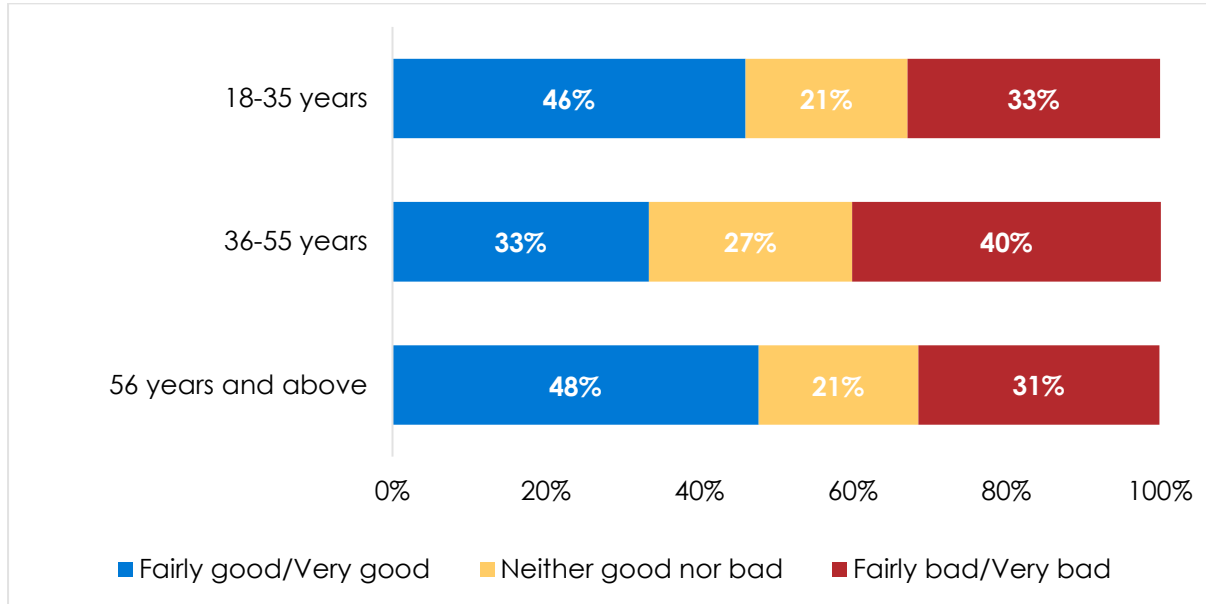
Figure 4: Performance of elected leaders | by age group | Mauritius | 2022



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who "strongly approve" or "approve")

Fewer than half (46%) of young Mauritians describe their personal living conditions as either “fairly good” or “very good,” on par with older respondents (48%). The middle-aged (33%) are least likely to say that their living conditions are good (Figure 5).

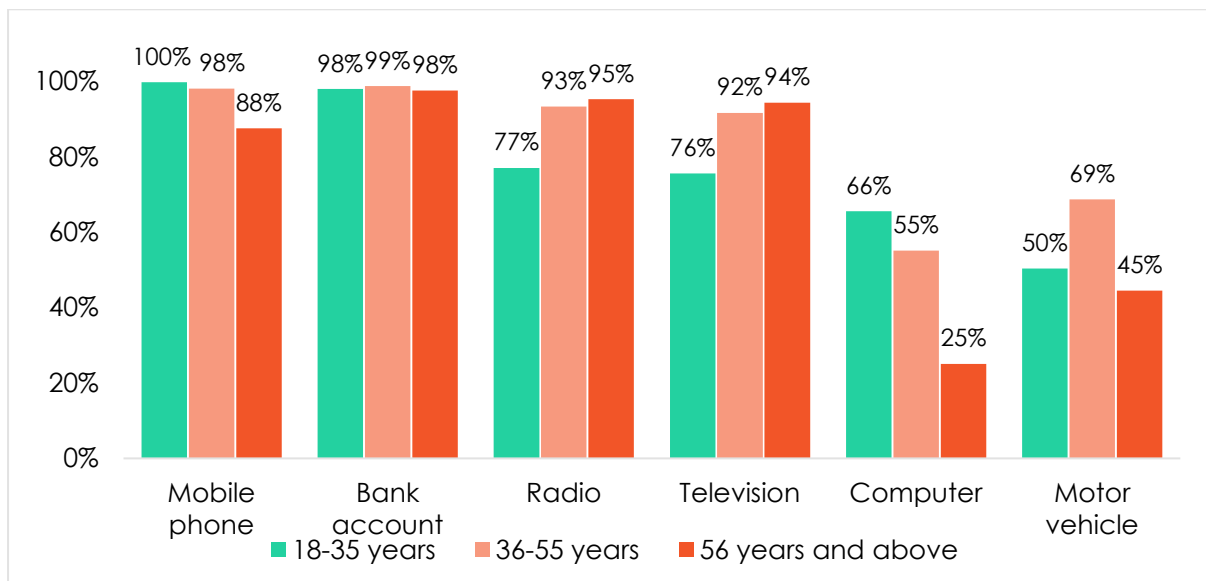
Figure 5: Personal living conditions | by age group | Mauritius | 2022



Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?*

When it comes to asset ownership, virtually all young Mauritians own a mobile phone (100%) and a bank account (98%) (Figure 6). Fewer claim personal ownership of a radio (77%), a television (76%), or a motor vehicle (50%) – items that might be owned instead by the head of their household. But youth are considerably more likely than their elders to own a computer (66%, vs. 55% of 33- to 55-year-olds and 25% of those over age 55).

Figure 6: Asset ownership | by age group | Mauritius | 2022

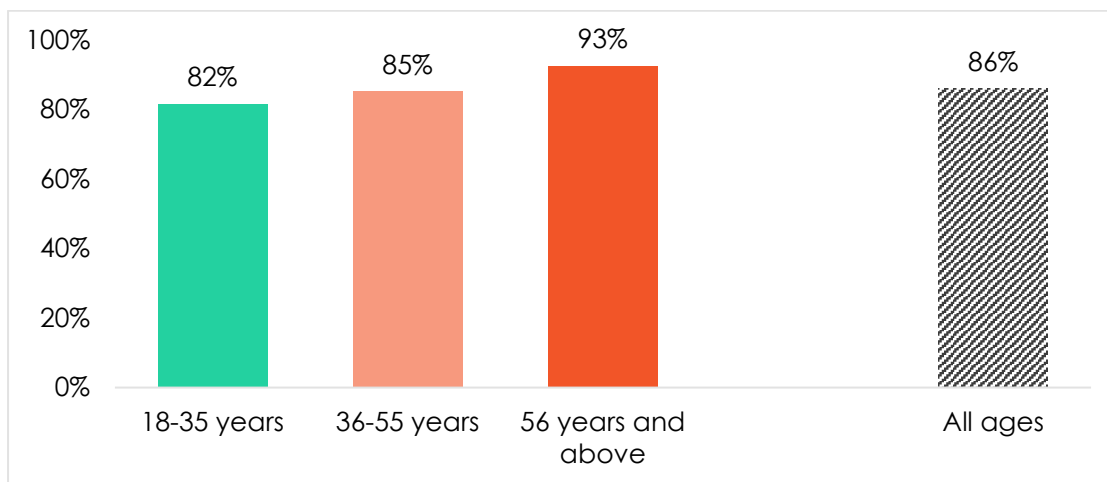


Respondents were asked: *Which of these things do you personally own?*

Political and civic engagement

Around the world, young people are generally less likely than their elders to vote in elections (Barrett, 2018). Afrobarometer survey findings show that this is true in Mauritius, too, but not by huge margins. Excluding respondents who were too young to vote at the time, close to nine in 10 respondents of all ages (86%) say they voted in the most recent national election in 2019, including 82% of 18- to 35-year-olds, 85% of the middle-aged, and 93% of older citizens (Figure 7).

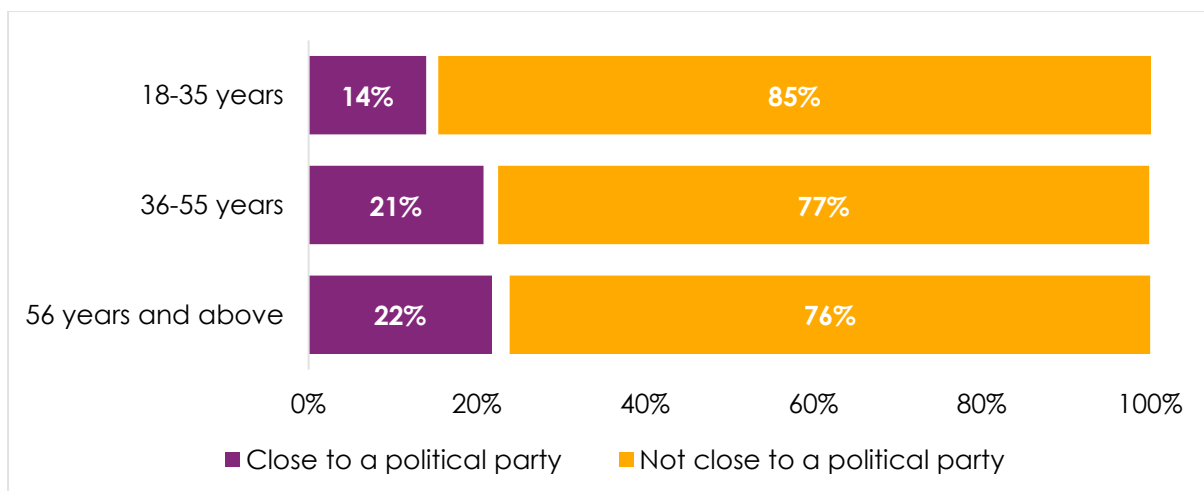
Figure 7: Self-reported voting in the 2019 election | by age group | Mauritius | 2022



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? (% who say they voted) (Respondents who were too young to vote in 2019 are excluded.)*

But while they may have voted, few young Mauritians identify with a particular political party: Only 14% of youth say they “feel close to” a party, compared to 21%-22% of their elders (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Political party affiliation | by age group | Mauritius | 2022



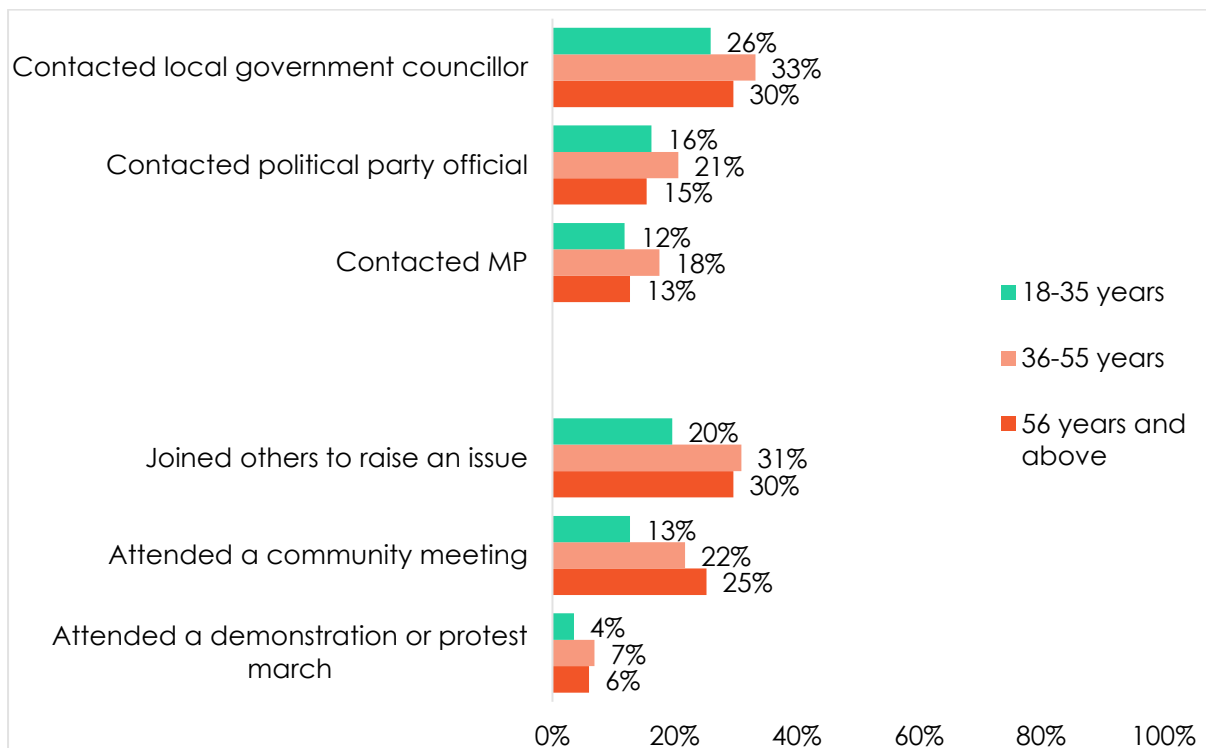
Respondents were asked: *Do you feel close to any particular political party?*

In other forms of political and civic engagement, young Mauritians also lag behind their elders (Figure 9). They are less likely than the middle-aged to report making contact during the previous year with a local government councillor (26% vs. 33%), with a political party official (16% vs. 21%), and with a member of Parliament (12% vs. 18%).

They are also less likely than middle-aged and older citizens to report having joined others to raise an issue (20%, vs. 30%-31%) or attended a community meeting (13%, vs. 22%-25%) during the previous 12 months.

Even when it comes to participating in a protest march or demonstration during the past year, youth (4%) are no more active than their elders (6%-7%).

Figure 9: Participation in civic and political activities | by age group | Mauritius | 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")
 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

With unemployment, insecurity, and economic management at the top of their agenda, young Mauritians find their government falling short on all fronts. Given their perceived failure to address key challenges confronting the youth demographic, elected leaders face less-than-stellar approval ratings from their young constituents. New strategies and investments may be required to break down barriers to labour-market participation by young Mauritians.

At the same time, survey findings suggest that the youth are not taking full advantage of political and civic opportunities to inject their voices into the public discourse. While

individual initiative plays an obvious role, elected officials and civil society may also be able to commit greater support to youth engagement, including reducing the administrative, financial, and personal costs that may keep some young people outside political processes looking in.

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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.

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