

# Namibian youth demand that government make job creation a top priority

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 773 | Asafika Mpako and Stephen Ndoma**

## Summary

Namibia's youth face major challenges in a constrained economy with high unemployment. The most recent Labour Force Survey, conducted in 2018, revealed that unemployment among the country's youth (defined as ages 15-34 years) stood at an astounding 46.1% (Ndjaveru, 2022; Tendane, Hartman, & Alberts, 2023). On Namibia's Independence Day last March, discontented youth took to the streets to protest against joblessness, and political leaders have warned repeatedly that the youth unemployment crisis could lead to social unrest (Matthys, 2023; Petersen, 2023; New Era Live, 2023).

Are policy makers paying attention to the needs of young Namibians?

The quest to address the needs of Namibia's youth is captured in the vision of the government's third National Youth Policy (2020-2030), which seeks to achieve holistic youth development through a focus on four key thematic pillars: health and well-being, education and skills training, employment and economic empowerment, and political and civic participation (Ministry of Sport, Youth & National Service, 2021; UNFPA Namibia, 2021).

Government initiatives to reduce unemployment in the country include the Namibia Youth Credit Scheme, designed to encourage and support youth entrepreneurship through loans to unemployed young people who do not qualify for funding through the mainstream banking system (Ministry of Sport, Youth & National Service, 2024). The government has also focused efforts on closing the skills gap in the labour market through technical and vocational education and training (Namibia Economist, 2023).

The National Youth Council has inaugurated a national task force charged with implementing recommendations of the targeted review report on youth unemployment by the African Peer Review Mechanism (Lucas, 2023; Simelane, 2023).

The 2020 Global Youth Development Index ranked Namibia 119<sup>th</sup> out of 181 countries when it comes to promoting youth education, employment, health, equality and inclusion, peace and security, and political and civic participation, placing it ahead of its neighbours South Africa (No. 131), Eswatini (No. 152), Zimbabwe (No. 159), Lesotho (No. 163), Angola (No. 166), and Mozambique (No. 173) (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021).

A 2021 Afrobarometer survey provides an on-the-ground look at the situation of youth in Namibia. Findings show that Namibian youth (defined here as ages 18-35) have more education than their elders but are also more likely to be unemployed. Unemployment is by far the most important problem that young Namibians want their government to address.

Fewer than half of the youth demographic approve of the way the prime minister, members of the National Assembly, representatives of the National Council, and elected regional councillors have performed their jobs. Though powerful in number, Namibian youth are less engaged than their elders in change-making activities such as voting, contacting leaders, and attending community meetings.

## 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 survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed 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 Namibia, led by Survey Warehouse, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Namibians between 31 October and 16 November 2021. 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 have been conducted in Namibia in 1999, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019.

## Key findings

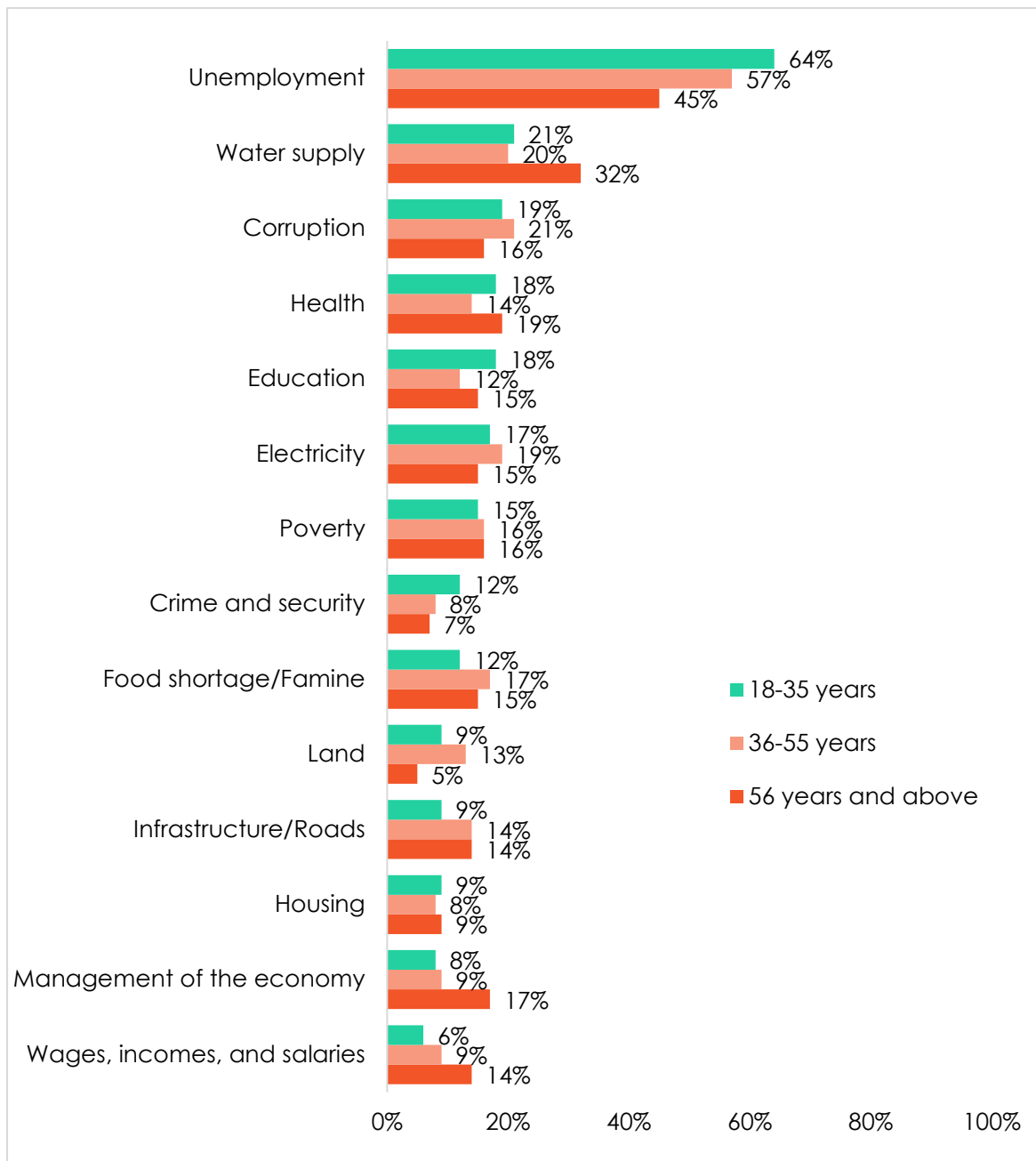
- Unemployment ranks at the top among problems that Namibian youth (aged 18-35 years) want their government to address, followed by water supply and corruption.
- Namibian youth have more education than their elders. Nearly eight in 10 youth (79%) have secondary or post-secondary schooling, compared to 67% in the 36-55 age group and 43% in the over-55 age group.
- But they are also more likely to be unemployed: More than four in 10 young Namibians (44%) say they are looking for a job, compared to 36% of middle-aged and 9% of older citizens.
- Young citizens' assessments of the government's performance on their priority issues are generally unfavourable, including just 16% approval of the government's efforts on job creation.
- While a slim majority (52%) of young Namibians approve of the job performance of the late President Hage Geingob, fewer than half endorse the performance of their prime minister (46%), members of the National Assembly (48%), representatives to the National Council (49%), and their elected regional councillor (47%).
- Only 37% of Namibian youth describe their personal living conditions as "fairly good" or "very good," while 49% say they are bad.
- Young Namibians are less likely than their elders to engage in political and civic activities, including voting, contacting leaders, attending community meetings, and joining others to raise an issue.

## Most important problems

Jobs far outrank all other issues on young Namibians' agenda for government action. Almost two-thirds (64%) of 18- to 35-year-olds cite unemployment as one of the three most important problems that the government should address, compared to 45%-57% of older respondents (Figure 1).

Water supply (21%) ranks a distant second, followed by corruption (19%), health (18%), education (18%), electricity (17%), and poverty (15%).

**Figure 1: Most important problems** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



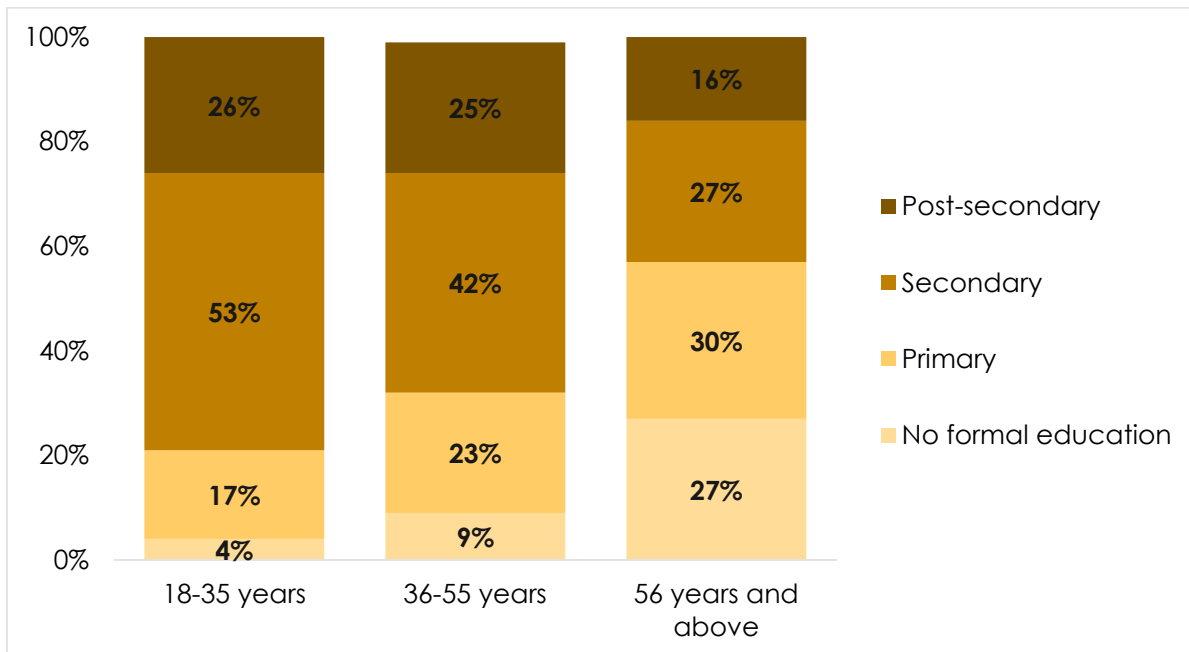
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three answers per respondent were recorded. The figure shows the % of respondents who cited each problem among their three priorities.)

### The status of youth: More educated, less employed

Namibian youth are more likely than their elders to have an education, but they are less likely to have a job.

Almost eight in 10 young Namibians (79%) have secondary or post-secondary schooling, compared to 67% in the 36-55 age group and 43% in the over-55 age group (Figure 2). Youth are also far less likely than older Namibians to lack formal education altogether (4% vs. 27% among senior respondents).

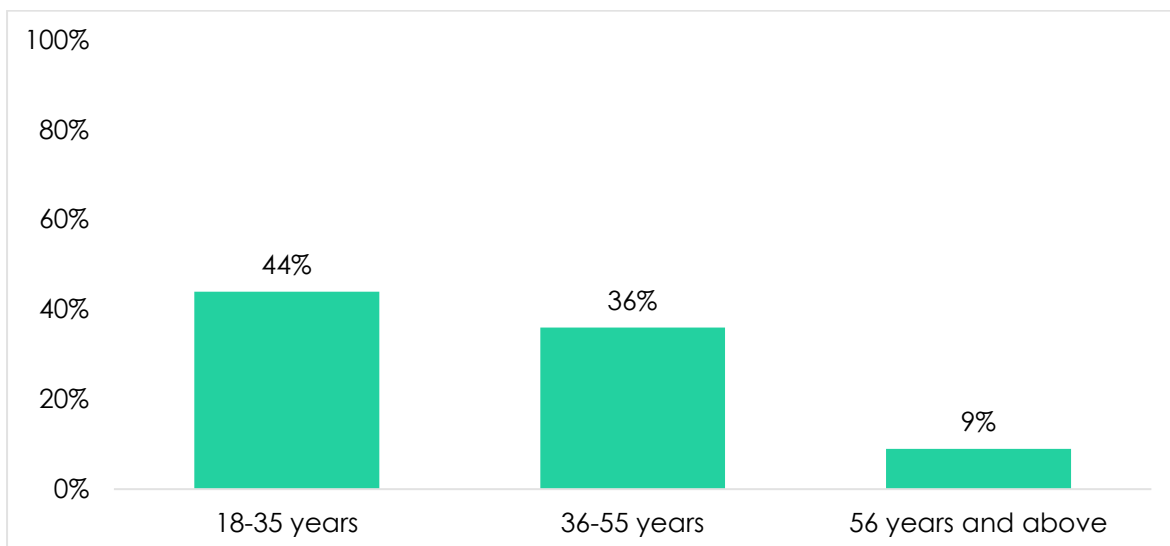
**Figure 2: Education level** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



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

While they are more likely than their elders to be educated, young people are also more likely to be looking for cash-income jobs. More than four in 10 youth (44%) say they are unemployed and looking for work, compared to 36% of middle-aged and 9% of older citizens (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Not employed and looking for a job** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



**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? (% who say "no, but looking")

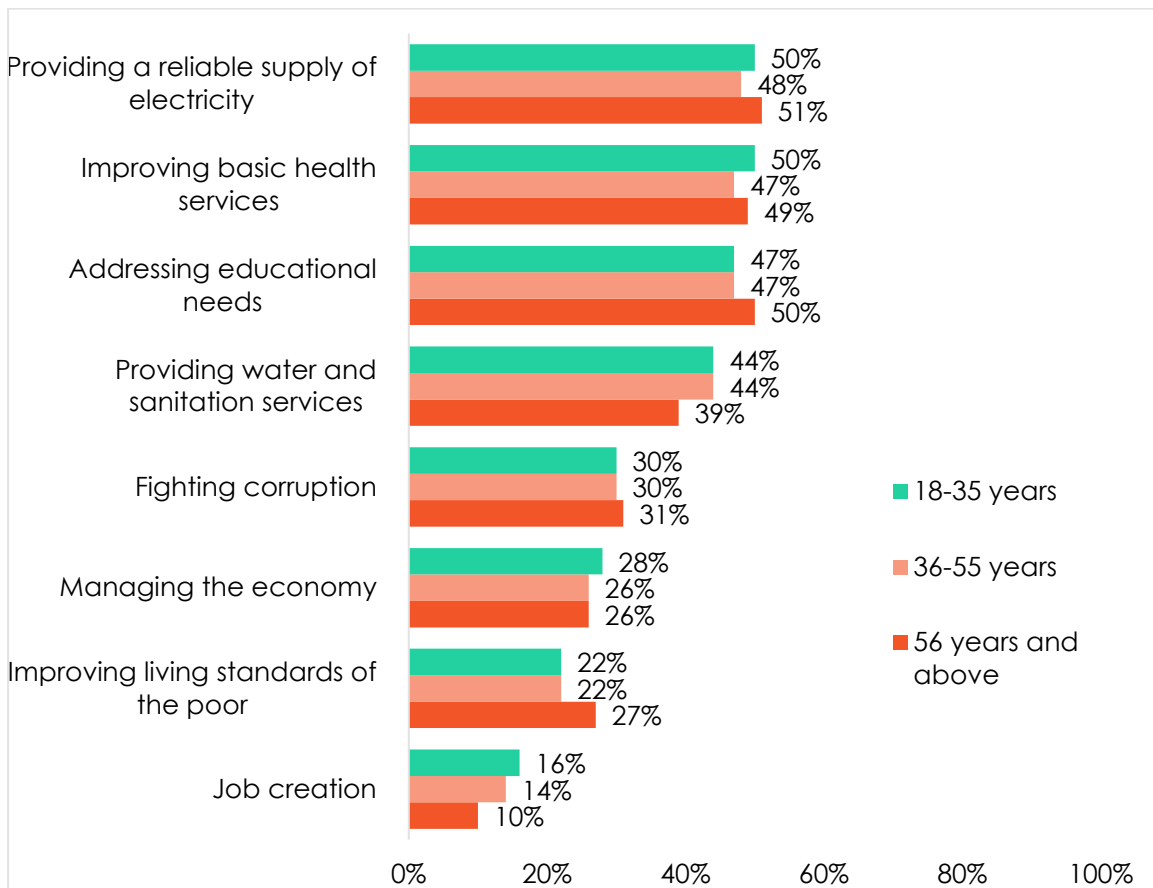
### Is the government meeting the needs of Namibia's youth?

Young Namibians are generally unimpressed with their government's performance on their priority issues (Figure 4). Only about one in six young respondents (16%) say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" on job creation.

Half applaud the government's performance on providing a reliable supply of electricity (50%) and improving basic health services (50%), but fewer offer favourable assessments on addressing educational needs (47%), providing water and sanitation services (44%), fighting corruption (30%), managing the economy (28%), and improving the living standards of the poor (22%).

In these assessments, young respondents differ only modestly from their elders.

**Figure 4: Government performance on youth priorities | by age group**  
 | Namibia | 2021

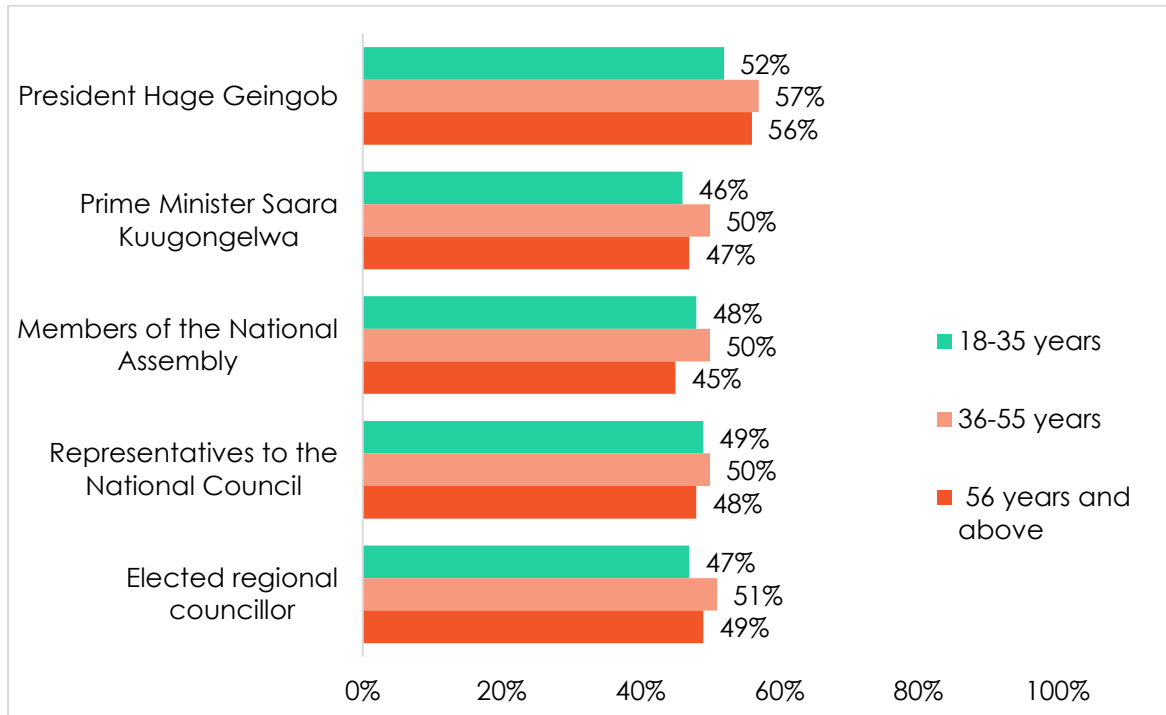


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Given their perceived failure to address key socio-economic challenges, it is unsurprising that elected leaders receive relatively low approval ratings from Namibian youth. A slim majority of young citizens (52%) "approve" or "strongly approve" of the performance of the late President Hage Geingob. Fewer than half endorse the performance of their prime minister (46%), members of the National Assembly (48%), representatives to the National Council (49%), and their elected regional councillor (47%) (Figure 5).

Here, too, young Namibians don't differ radically from their elders.

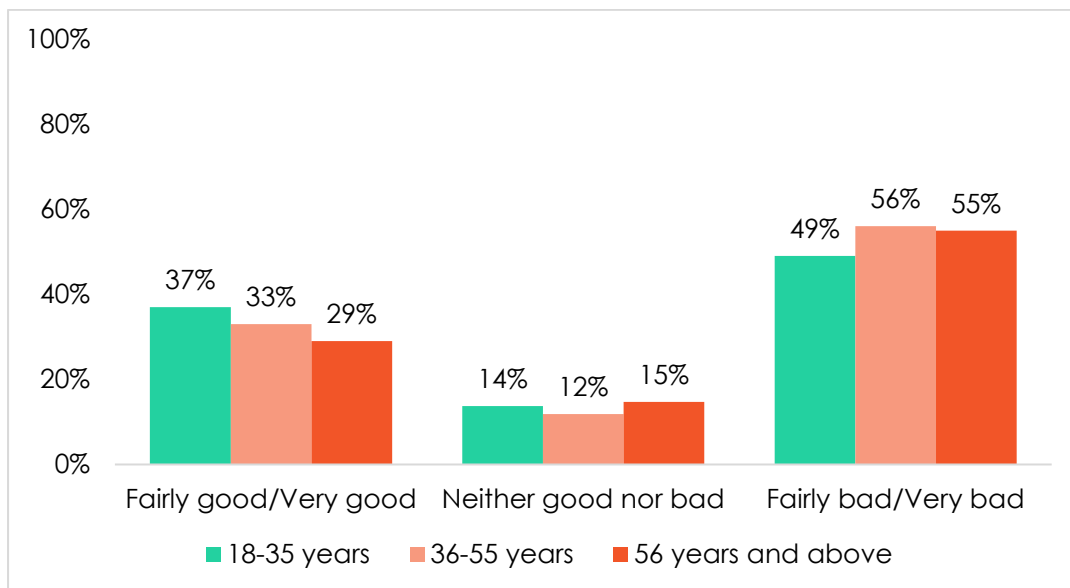
**Figure 5: Performance of elected leaders** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



**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 say "strongly approve" or "approve")

Young Namibians are less than enthusiastic about their personal living conditions. Only 37% describe them as either "fairly good" or "very good," while 49% say they are "fairly bad" or "very bad" (Figure 6). Even so, their assessments are somewhat less gloomy than those of their elders.

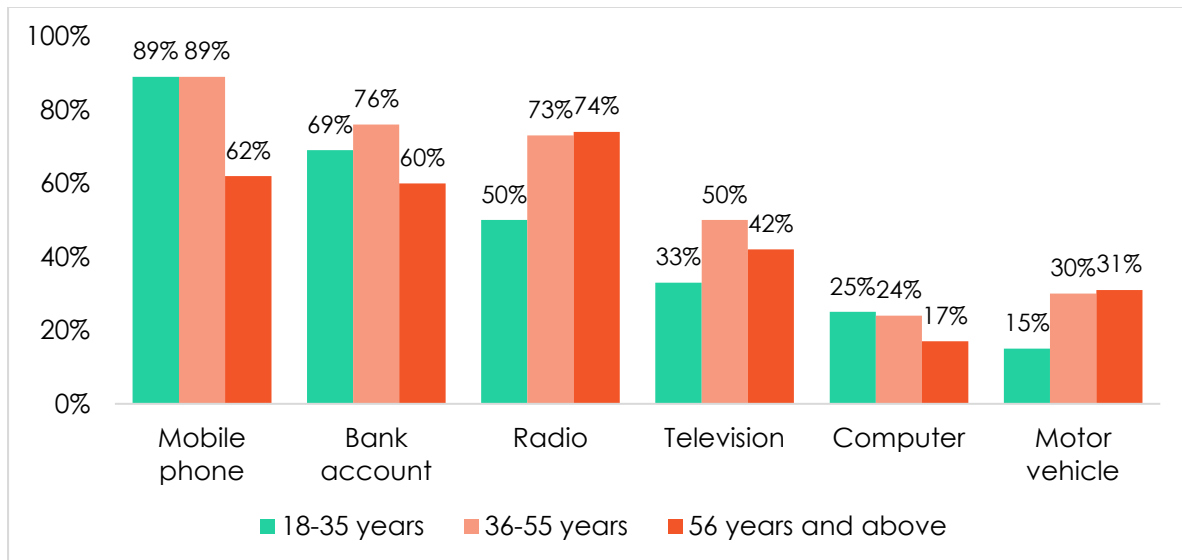
**Figure 6: Personal living conditions** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



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

When it comes to asset ownership, about nine in 10 young Namibians (89%) own a mobile phone, while 25% own a computer – the same proportions as reported by the middle age range (Figure 7). They are significantly less likely than their elders to claim personal ownership of a radio (50% vs. 73%-74%), television (33% vs. 42%-50%), and motor vehicle (15% vs. 30%-31%) – items that might be owned instead by the head of their household. They are also somewhat less likely to own a bank account (69% vs. 76% of the middle-aged cohort).

**Figure 7: Asset ownership** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



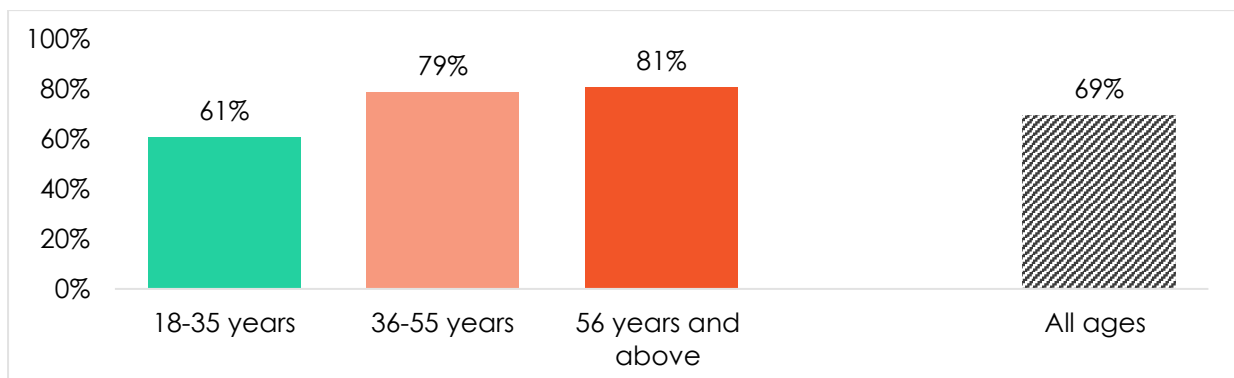
**Respondents were asked:** Which of these things do you personally own?

### Political and civic engagement by the youth

Around the world, young people are generally less likely than their elders to vote in elections (Barrett, 2018). Survey findings show that this is true in Namibia, too.

Excluding respondents who were too young to vote at the time, 69% of respondents of all ages say they voted in the most recent national election in 2019. But only 61% of 18- to 35-year-olds say they voted, compared to 79% of middle-aged and 81% of older citizens (Figure 8). The gap between youth and seniors is 20 percentage points.

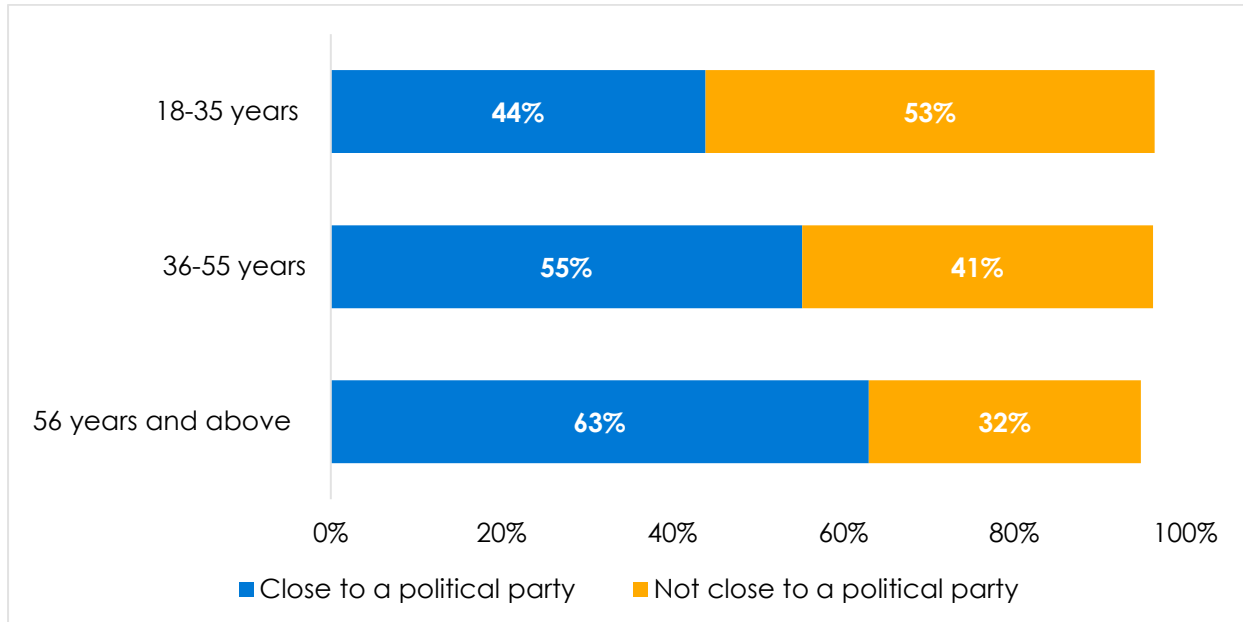
**Figure 8: Self-reported voting in the 2019 election** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



**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.)

Young people in Namibia are also less likely than the older generations to identify with a political party (Figure 9). Fewer than half (44%) of young respondents say they “feel close” to a party, trailing the middle (55%) and senior (63%) age groups.

**Figure 9: Political party affiliation** | by age group | Namibia | 2021



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

Similarly, young Namibians participate less than their elders in several other forms of political and civic activity (Figure 10). They are less likely to say they attended a community meeting during the previous year (39% vs. 57%-58% of the other age groups) or joined others to raise an issue (36% vs. 42%-49% of older citizens).

**Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).**

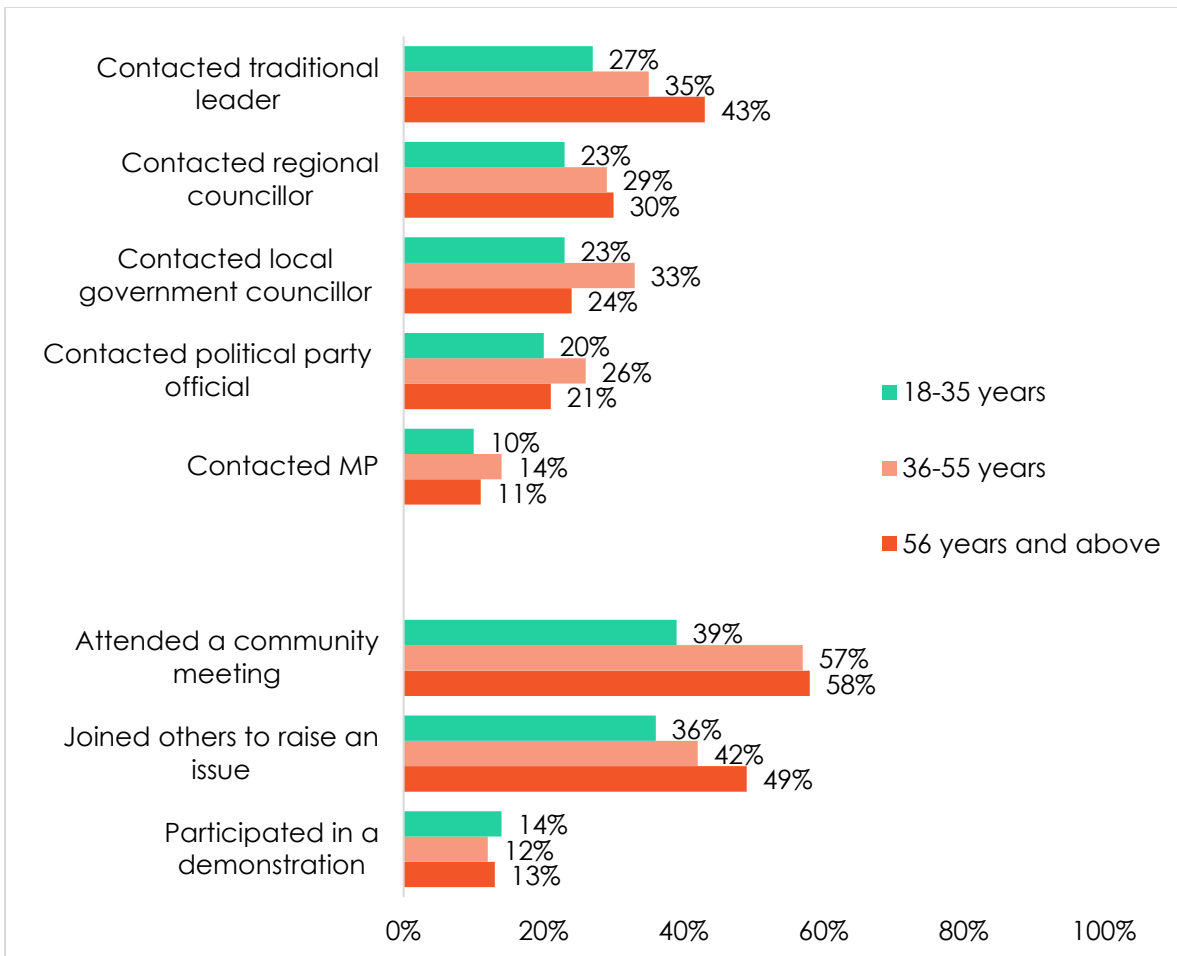
They are also less likely to report having contacted a traditional leader (27% vs. 35%-43% of their elders) or a regional councillor (23% vs. 29%-30%) during the previous year. In contrast, they were no less likely than the over-55 age bracket to contact a local government councillor (23% vs. 24%), political party official (20% vs. 21%), or

member of Parliament (MP) (10% vs. 11%), though contact with these officials was higher among the middle-aged group.

Young citizens match their middle-aged and older counterparts when it comes to participating in a protest march or demonstration (14% of youth vs. 12%-13% of older respondents).



**Figure 10: Participation in civic and political activities** | by age group | Namibia  
 | 2021



**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**

Young Namibians rank unemployment as by far the top priority needing urgent government action, and they are dissatisfied with their government's failure to create jobs. At the same time, survey findings suggest that the youth are not taking full advantage of civic and political avenues to make their voices and priorities heard.

Looking ahead to the 2024 elections, concrete solutions to the youth unemployment crisis could be the winning formula for political parties and for Namibia's youth.

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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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