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Young Botswana more educated, less employed, less politically engaged than their elders

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 818 | Asafika Mpako and Stephen Ndoma

Summary

Despite its impressive record of economic growth (Sunday Standard, 2024), Botswana is a country in the throes of a tremendous unemployment challenge – particularly youth unemployment (APAnews, 2019).

According to the most recent Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey, the unemployment rate among youth (15-35 years) rose from 33.5% to 34.4% in the third quarter of 2023, compared to the national average of 25.9% (Statistics Botswana, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

Botswana's revised National Youth Policy (2010), which is currently undergoing review (Daily News Botswana, 2023), identifies 12 key strategic areas for government attention, including employment, poverty and hunger, education, skills development and training, and health (Botswana Labour Market Observatory, 2010). The government's latest effort to curb unemployment comes in the form of the National Employment Policy, which seeks to create sustainable employment opportunities and is designed to complement the country's Vision 2036 and National Development Plan 11 (Republic of Botswana, 2021).

The 2023 Global Youth Development Index ranks Botswana 142nd out of 183 countries when it comes to promoting youth education, employment, health and well-being, equality and inclusion, peace and security, and political and civic participation, down from 108th position in 2020 (Commonwealth Secretariat 2021, 2024). It trails regional peers Mauritius (No. 69), Namibia (No. 126), and South Africa (No. 141).

Afrobarometer survey findings provide an on-the-ground look at the situation of youth in Botswana. Botswana youth (defined here as aged 18-35) have more education than their elders but are also more likely to be unemployed. In a list that includes corruption, crime, and management of the economy, unemployment is by far the most important problem that young Botswana want their government to address.

Like their elders, youth are critical of the government's performance on creating jobs, narrowing gaps between rich and poor, fighting corruption, managing the economy, improving the living standards of the poor, and reducing crime, and few approve of the performance of their elected officials. But survey findings also suggest that many young Botswana are disconnected from political processes and are not taking full advantage of available avenues to make their voices and priorities heard.

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 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Botswana, led by Star Awards, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Batswana in July-August 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 Botswana in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019.

Key findings

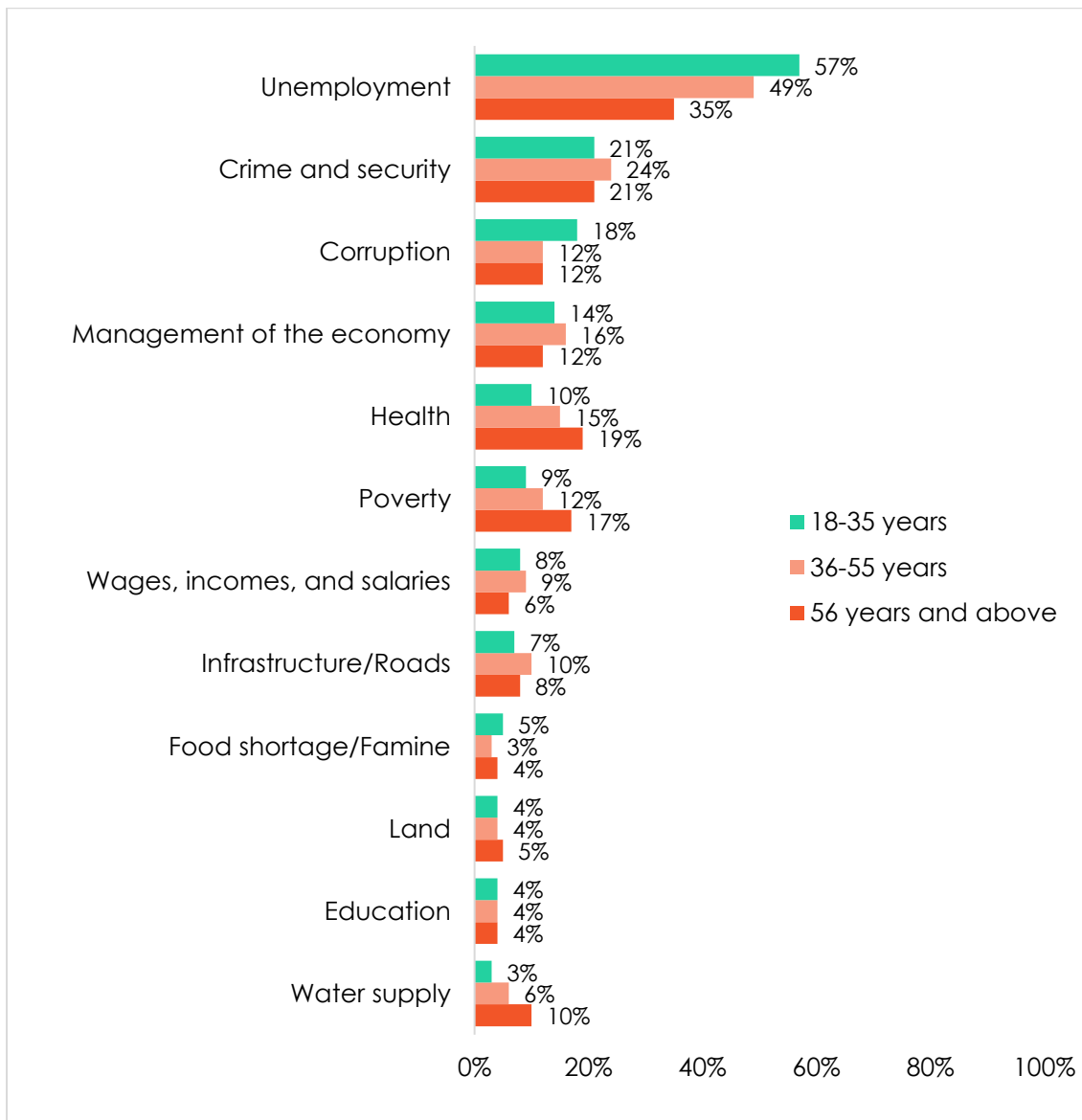
- Unemployment tops the list of most important problems that Batswana youth want their government to address, followed by crime and security, corruption, management of the economy, and health.
- Botswana's youth have more education than their elders. More than nine in 10 young Batswana (92%) have secondary or post-secondary schooling, compared to 67% in the 36-55 age group and 21% in the over-55 age group.
- But they are also more likely to be unemployed: Six in 10 young Batswana (60%) say they are looking for a job, compared to 55% of middle-aged and 24% of older citizens.
- Fewer than half of young citizens say the government is doing a good job of addressing their priorities, including reducing crime (41%), managing the economy (35%), fighting corruption (33%), and creating jobs (14%).
- Fewer than one-third of youth approve of the performance of their elected local government councillor (31%), their member of Parliament (25%), and their president (23%).
- Only 15% of young respondents describe their personal living conditions as "fairly good" or "very good," though their assessments are less gloomy than those of older cohorts.
- Young Batswana 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

For young Batswana, unemployment (cited by 57%) is by far the most important problem that the government must address, followed by crime and security (21%), corruption (18%), management of the economy (14%), and health (10%) (Figure 1). Compared to their elders, young citizens are more likely to prioritise unemployment and corruption and less likely to mention health, poverty, and water supply as urgent action items for the government.

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



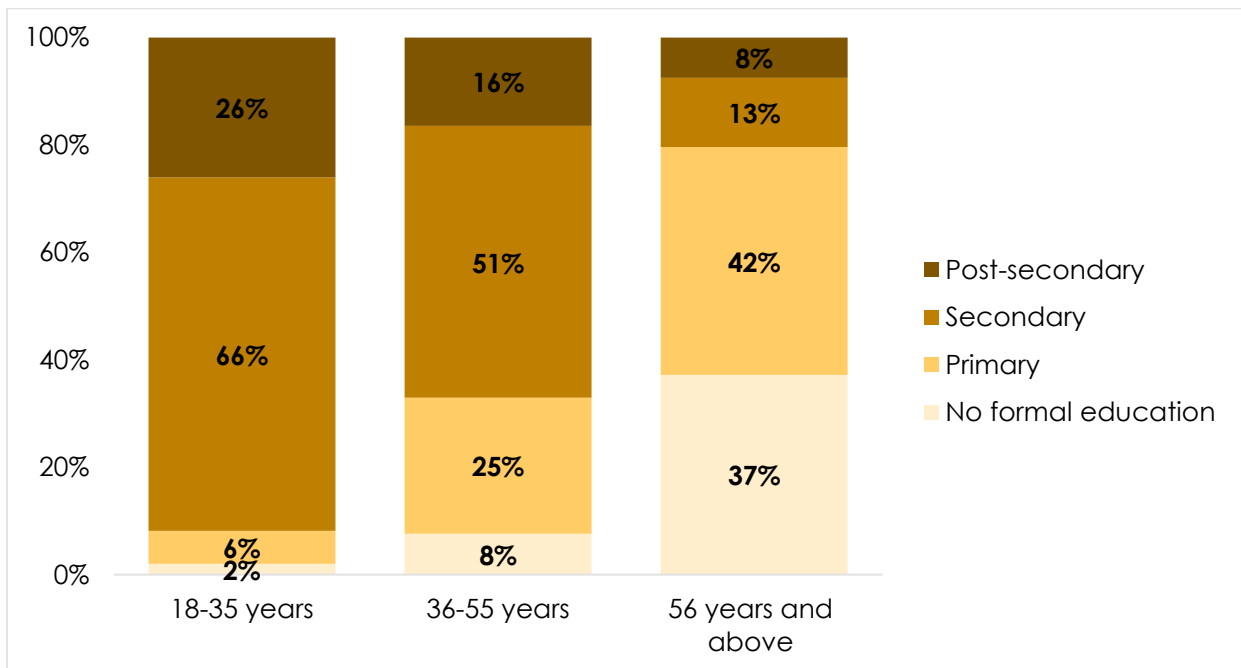
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three answers per respondent were recorded. The figure shows the % of respondents who cite each problem among their three priorities.)*

The status of youth: More educated, less employed

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

One in four young Batswana (26%) have post-secondary schooling, compared to 16% in the 36-55 age group and 8% in the over-55 age group (Figure 2). Fully two-thirds (66%) of youth cite secondary schooling as their highest level of education, vs. 51% and 13% of the older cohorts. Only 2% of youth lack formal education altogether, compared to 8% and 37% of their elders.

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

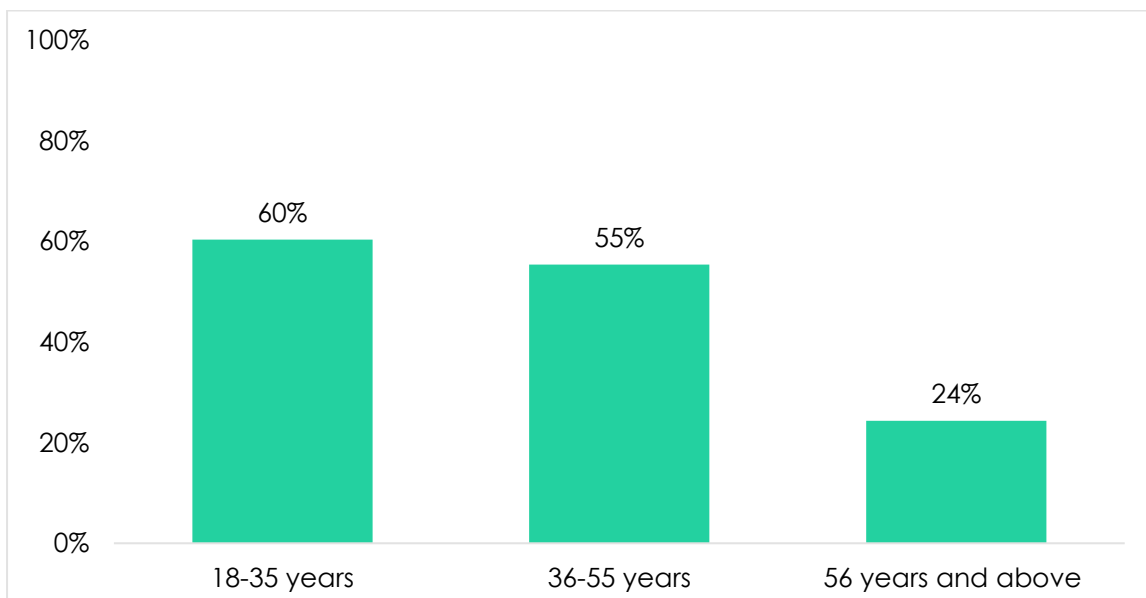


Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education?

Even though they are more likely than their elders to be educated, young people are also more likely to be looking for cash-income jobs.

Across the age brackets, six in 10 youth (60%) say they are unemployed and looking for work, compared to 55% of middle-aged and 24% of older citizens (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Not employed and looking for a job | by age group | Botswana | 2022



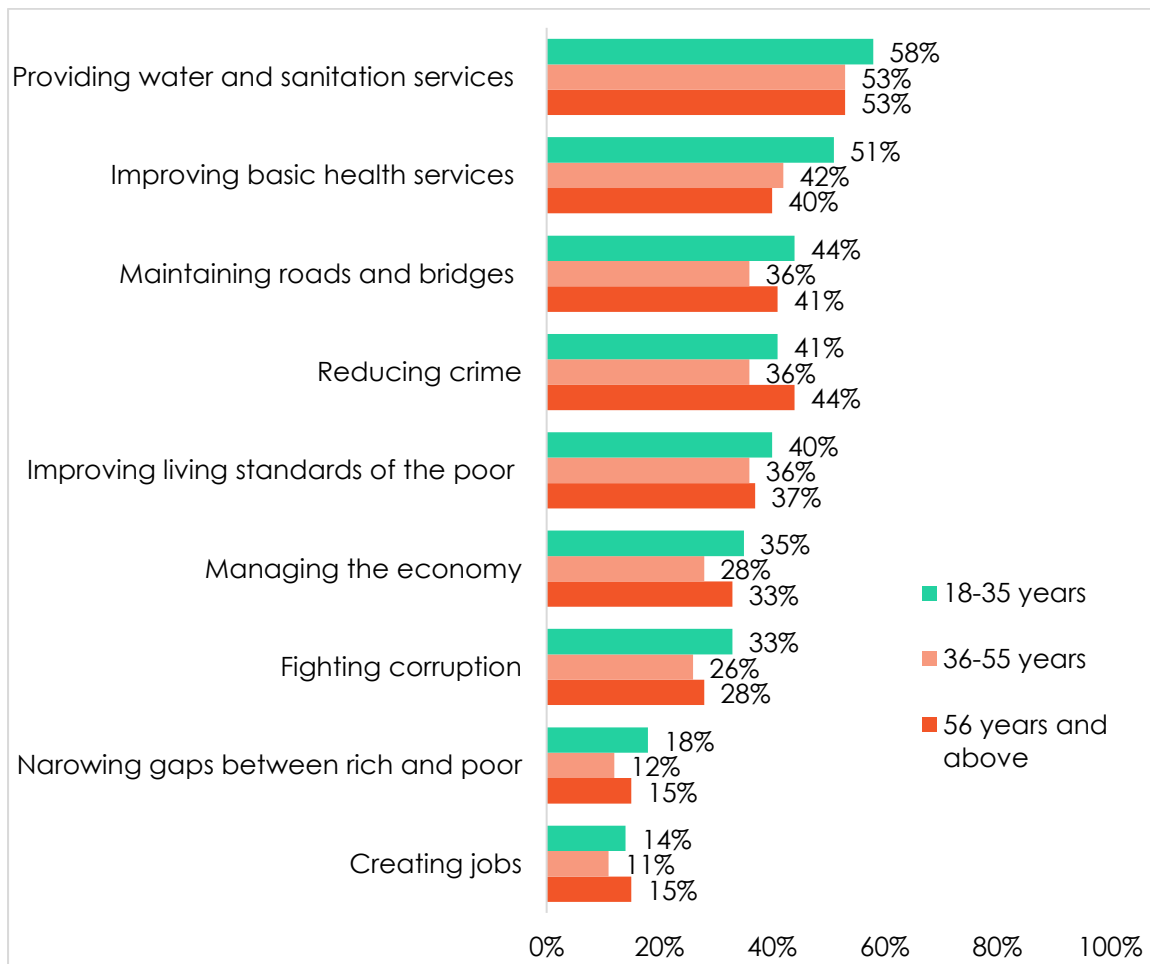
Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job? (% who say "no, but looking")

Is the government meeting the needs of Botswana's youth?

Looking at the issues that young Botswana prioritise for government action, only one in seven youth (14%) say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” on job creation (Figure 4). About one-third think it is doing a good job of fighting corruption (33%) and managing the economy (35%), while about four in 10 applaud the government's performance on improving the living standards of the poor (40%), reducing crime (41%), and maintaining roads and bridges (44%).

Young Botswana are more likely to give the government good marks on improving basic health services (51%) and providing water and sanitation services (58%).

Figure 4: Government performance on youth priorities | by age group | Botswana | 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”)

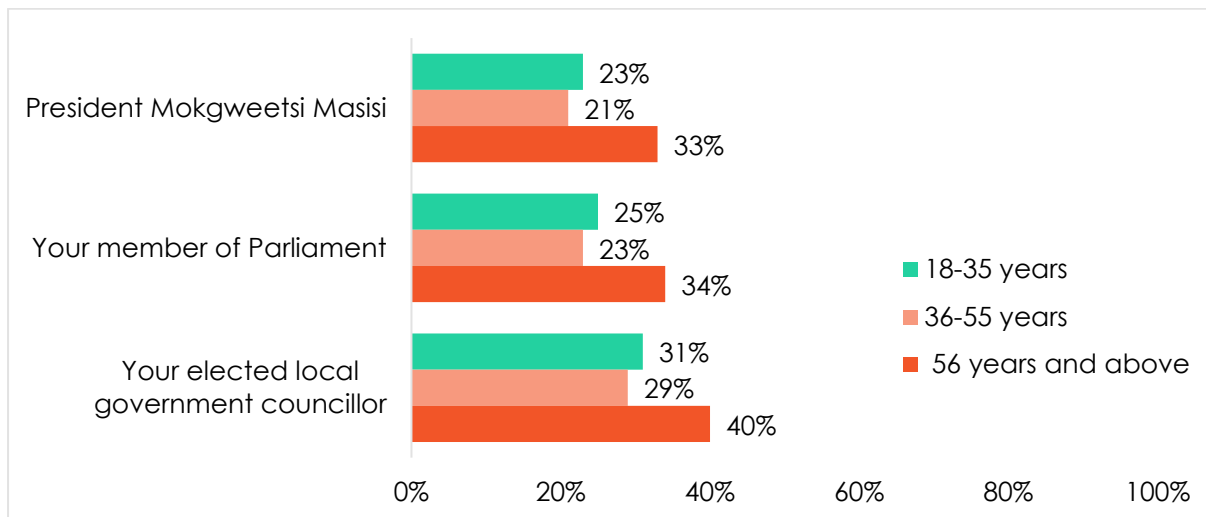
Given their perceived failure to address key socio-economic challenges, it is unsurprising that elected leaders receive strikingly low performance ratings from young citizens.

Only three in 10 youth (31%) “approve” or “strongly approve” of the performance of their elected local government councillor, while about one-quarter are satisfied with the

performance of their member of Parliament (25%) and President Mokgweetsi Masisi (23%) (Figure 5).

Young Batswana are more likely than senior respondents to offer less-than-stellar job performance assessments.

Figure 5: Performance of elected leaders | by age group | Botswana | 2022

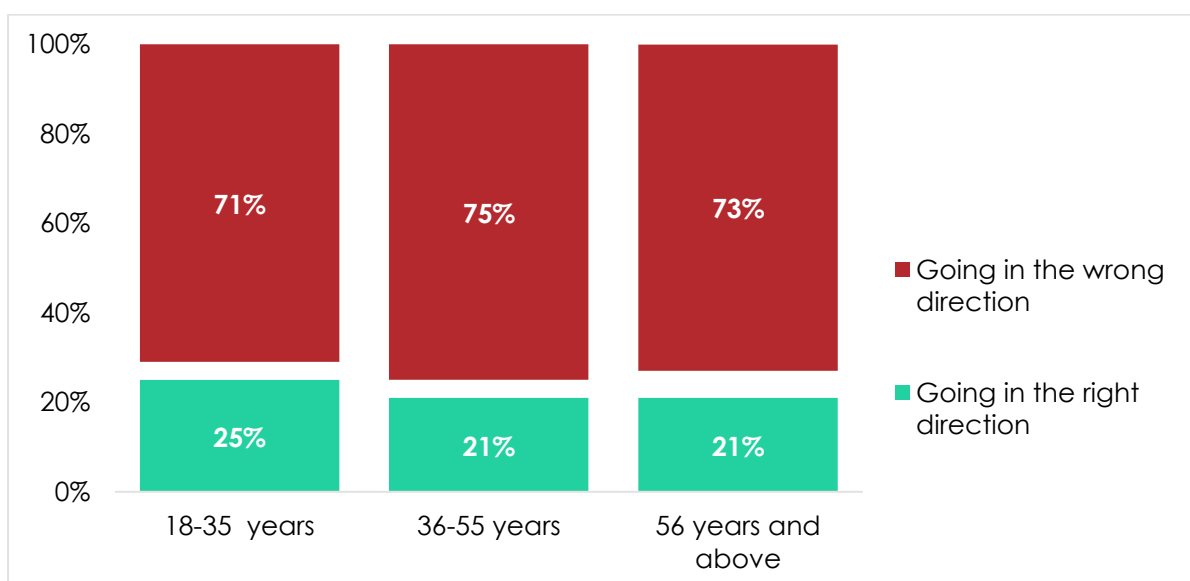


Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who "approve" or "strongly approve")

Views on overall country direction and economic situation

Overall, young Batswana are about as pessimistic as their elders about their country's direction: 71% say Botswana is headed in "the wrong direction," compared to 73%-75% among citizens over age 35 (Figure 6).

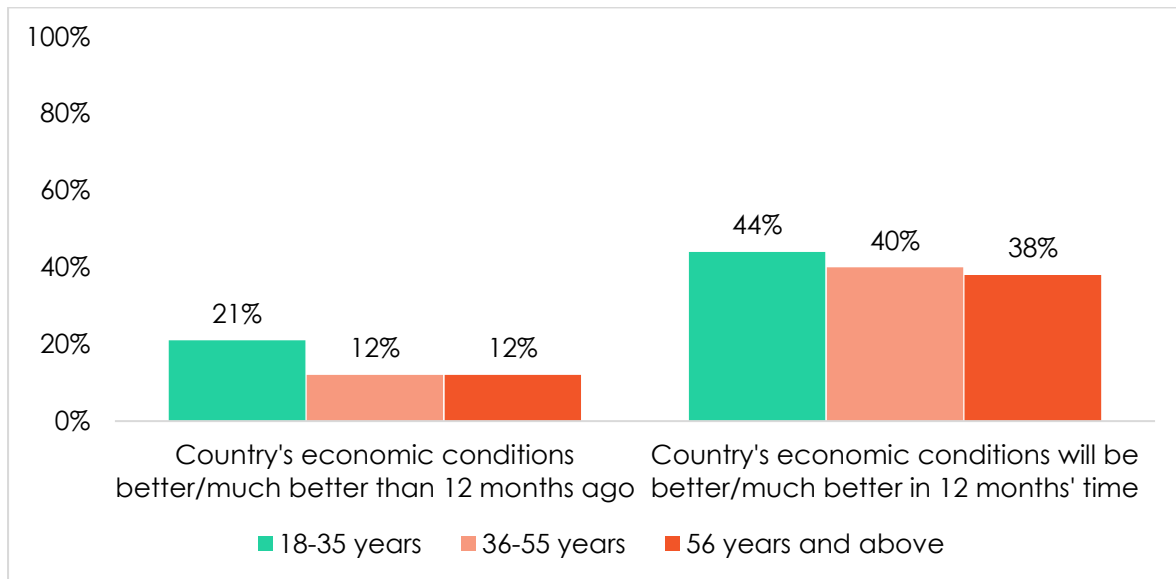
Figure 6: Overall direction of the country | by age group | Botswana | 2022



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

Young citizens are also largely negative – but less negative than their elders – about the country's economic conditions. While only 21% think that economic conditions got better over the previous year, that's twice the proportion of older cohorts (12%) who see improvement (Figure 7). And 44% of youth expect things to get “better” or “much better” during the next 12 months, compared to 38%-40% of older respondents.

Figure 7: Positive assessments of country's economic conditions – retrospective and prospective outlook | by age group | Botswana | 2022

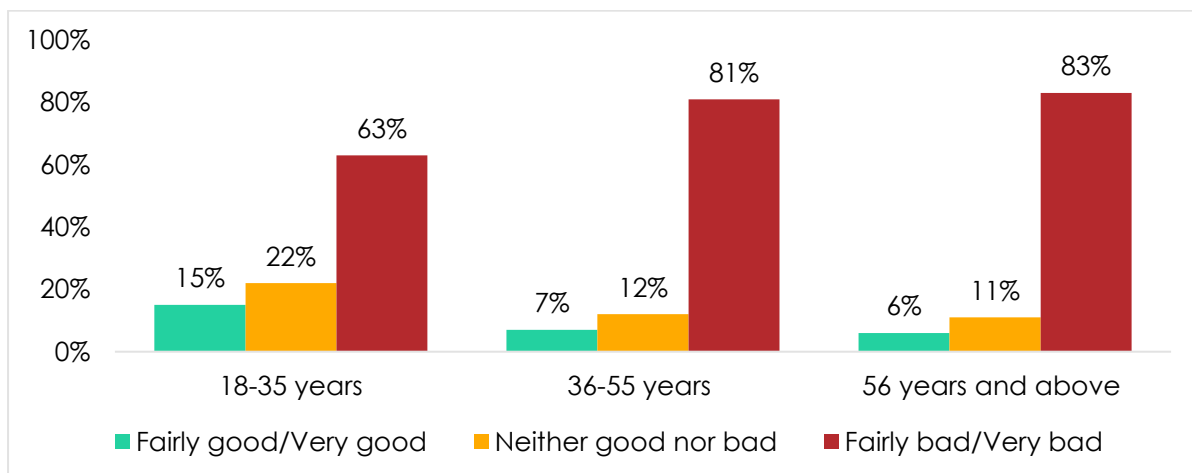


Respondents were asked:

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?

Regarding their personal living conditions, young Batswana also offer grim assessments, though again less grim than their elders. Only 15% of youth describe their living conditions as either “fairly good” or “very good,” while 63% say they are “fairly bad” or “very bad” (Figure 8). Among older respondents, more than eight in 10 see their living conditions as bad.

Figure 8: Personal living conditions | by age group | Botswana | 2022

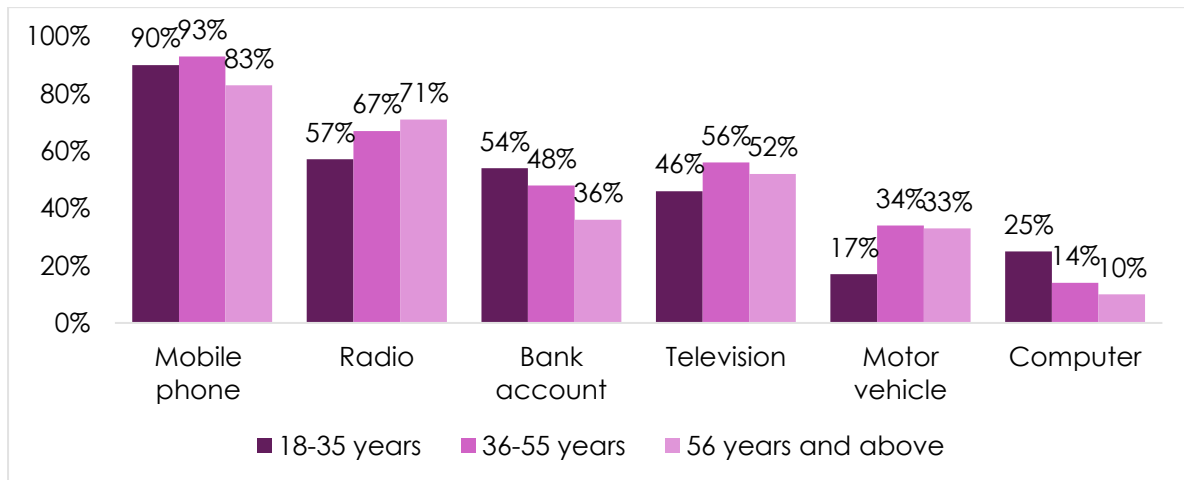


Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?

When it comes to asset ownership, nine in 10 young Batswana (90%) own a mobile phone – not very different from the middle age range (93%) (Figure 9). And youth are more likely than middle-aged and senior respondents to own a bank account (54% vs. 36%-48%) and a computer (25% vs. 10%-14%).

Young citizens trail their elders in the ownership of a radio (57% vs. 67%-71%), television (46% vs. 52%-56%), and motor vehicle (17% vs. 33%-34%).

Figure 9: Asset ownership | by age group | Botswana | 2022



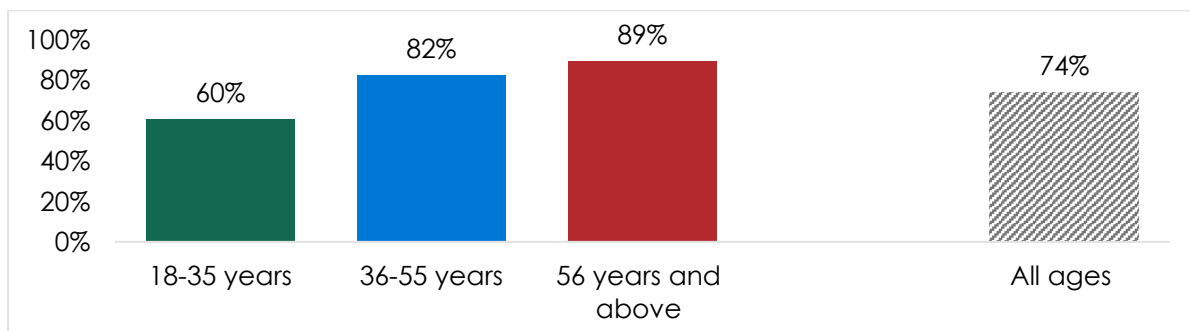
Respondents were asked: Which of these things do you personally own?

Political and civic engagement by the youth

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

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 Botswana, too. Excluding respondents who were too young to vote at the time, about three-quarters (74%) of respondents of all ages say they voted in the most recent national election in 2019. But only 60% of 18- to 35-year-olds say they voted, compared to 82% of middle-aged and 89% of older citizens (Figure 10). The gap between youth and seniors is a stunning 29 percentage points.

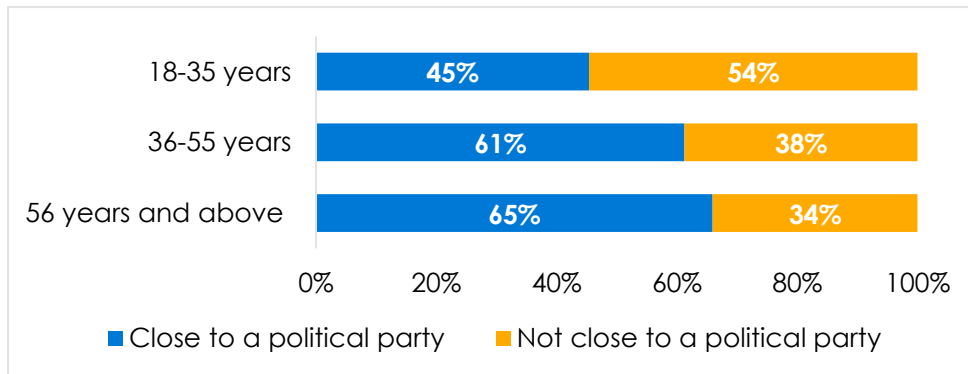
Figure 10: Self-reported voting in the 2019 election | by age group | Botswana | 2022



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.)

Young people in Botswana are also less likely than the older generations to identify with a political party (Figure 11). Fewer than half (45%) of young respondents say they “feel close” to a party, trailing the middle-aged (61%) and senior (65%) groups.

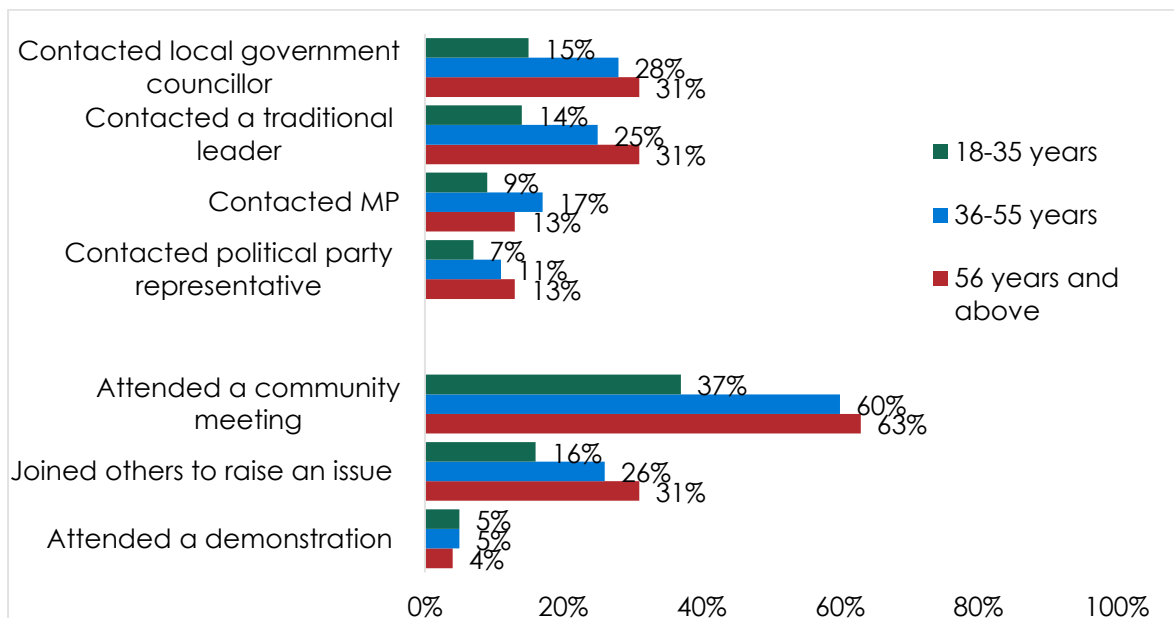
Figure 11: Political party affiliation | by age group | Botswana | 2022



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

Similarly, young Botswana participate less than their elders in several other forms of political and civic activity (Figure 12). They are less likely to report having contacted a local government councillor (15%, vs. 28%-31% of the older groups), a traditional leader (14% vs. 25%-31%), a member of Parliament (MP) (9% vs. 13%-17%), or a political party representative (7% vs. 11%-13%) during the previous year.

Figure 12: Participation in civic and political activities | by age group | Botswana | 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”)

They are also less likely to say they attended a community meeting (37% vs. 60%-63%) or joined others to raise an issue (16%, vs. 26%-31% of older citizens).

But they match their middle-aged and older counterparts when it comes to participating in a protest march or demonstration (5%).

Conclusion

Afrobarometer survey findings show that young Batswana see unemployment as the most important problem that needs to be addressed, and they are highly critical of their government's perceived failure to create jobs and resolve other key economic problems.

But findings also reveal that most youth are disconnected from civic and political processes, suggesting that there is scope for young citizens to make their voices heard more powerfully. The flipside is that if they value youth participation, government and stakeholders should facilitate opportunities for youth representation in policy- and decision-making processes.

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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, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Malawi provide technical support to the network.

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