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News release

African youth are committed to democracy but express greater dissatisfaction than their elders, Afrobarometer inaugural flagship report reveals

African youth prefer democracy to any kind of authoritarian alternative but are more likely than their elders to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their countries, Afrobarometer's inaugural flagship report shows.

The report, the first in what will be an annual series on high-priority topics, distils findings from data spanning more than a decade, including the latest round of nationally representative surveys in 39 African countries, representing the views of more than three-fourths of the continent's population.

The findings, based on 53,444 face-to-face interviews, show that while Africa's youth (aged 18-35) differ little from their elders in their support for democracy, they express a greater willingness to tolerate military intervention "when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends." They are also less trustful of government institutions and leaders and more likely to view them as corrupt.

But like young citizens throughout the world, young Africans are significantly less likely than older cohorts to express their dissatisfaction and preferences at the ballot box. They also trail their elders in other forms of political engagement, such as joining others to raise an issue and contacting a local government councillor.

The findings show that the youth rank unemployment and management of the economy as their top priorities for urgent government action, and large majorities see their governments as failing on these issues.

Taken together, these deficits suggest that the voices of young Africans are not yet fully heard in the continent's policy processes.

The report examines factors that drive democratic support and satisfaction in Africa and includes country democracy scorecards that present graphic illustrations of Afrobarometer findings on the most critical indicators of attitudes toward democracy for each of the 39 countries surveyed.

Afrobarometer survey

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.

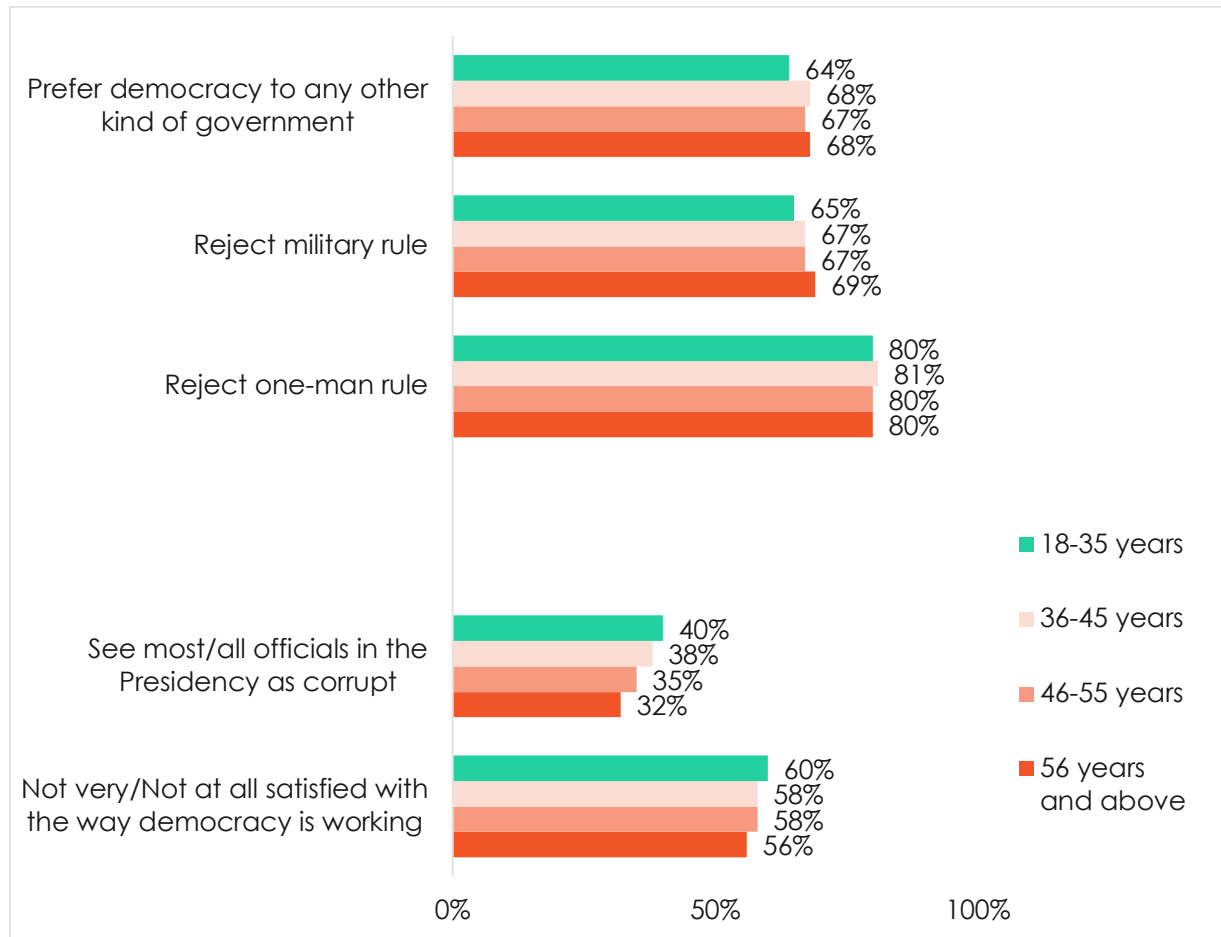
Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice. National samples of 1,200-2,400 yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Key findings

- On average across 39 countries, almost two-thirds (64%) of youth (aged 18-35) prefer democracy over any other kind of government (Figure 1).
 - They join older cohorts in rejecting dictatorship (80%) and military rule (65%) but are more likely to accept military takeovers "when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends" (56% of youth vs. 47% of those over age 55).
 - Youth are more likely than their elders to see "most" or "all" officials in the Presidency as corrupt (40%) and to be dissatisfied with the way democracy is working in their country (60%).
- Youth are less likely than older citizens to vote in elections: 63% of those old enough to vote in their country's last election say they did so, compared to 78%-84% of older cohorts (Figure 2).
 - They also trail in other forms of political engagement, including identifying with a political party, attending a community meeting, joining others to raise an issue, and contacting a local leader.
- Unemployment tops the list of the most important problems that African youth want their government to address (cited by 37%), followed by management of the economy (30%) and health (28%) (Figure 3).
- Only two in 10 youth (19%) say their government is performing well on job creation, while 25% and 41%, respectively are satisfied with the government's performance on economic management and improving basic health services (Figure 4).

Charts

Figure 1: Views on democracy | by age | 39 countries | 2021/2023



Respondents were asked:

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?

The army comes in to govern the country.

Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.

(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")

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.

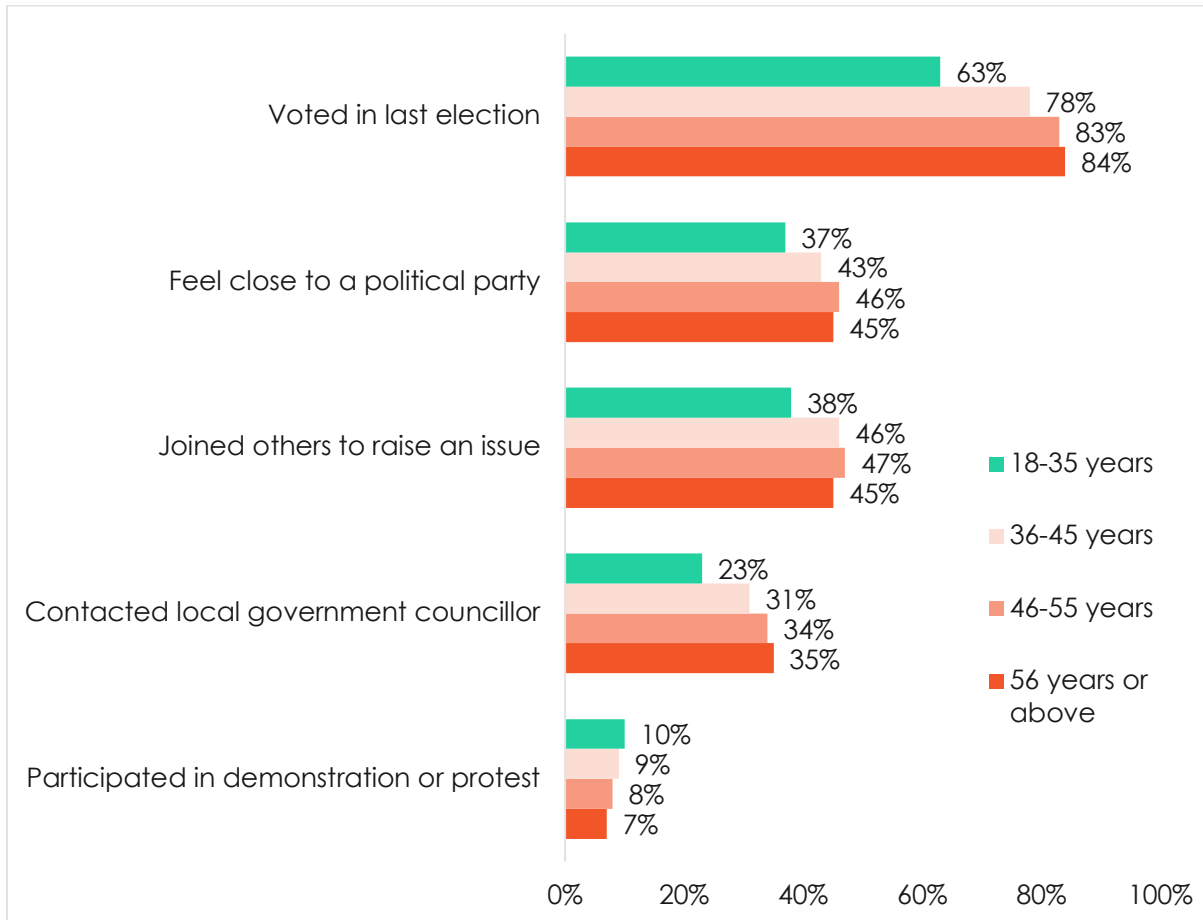
Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

(% who say democracy is preferable)

How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president and officials in his office? (% who say "most" or "all")

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [Country]? (% who say "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied")

Figure 2: Political participation | by age group | 39 countries* | 2021/2023



Respondents were asked:

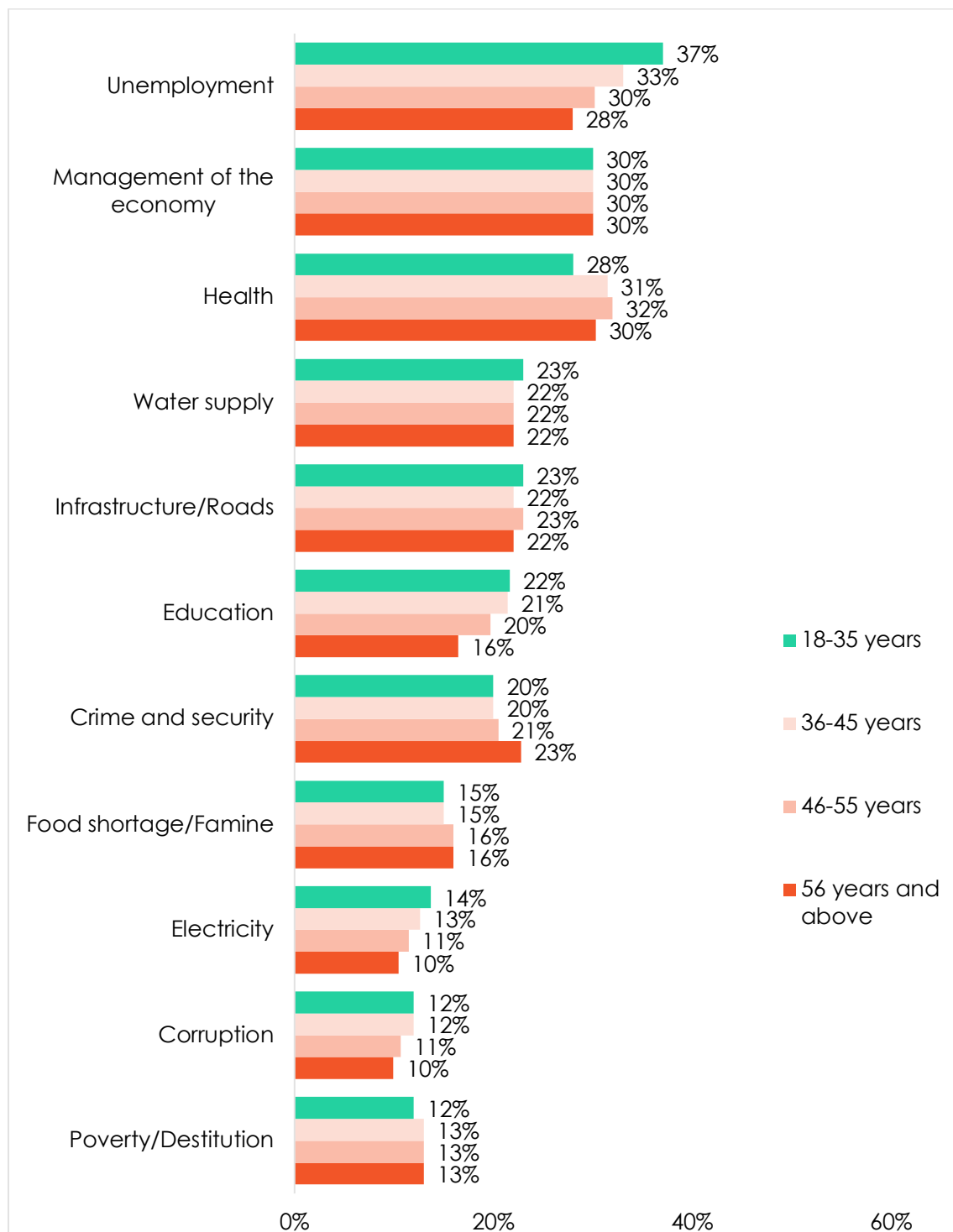
In the last national election, held in [year], did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (Respondents who were too young to vote are excluded.)

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")

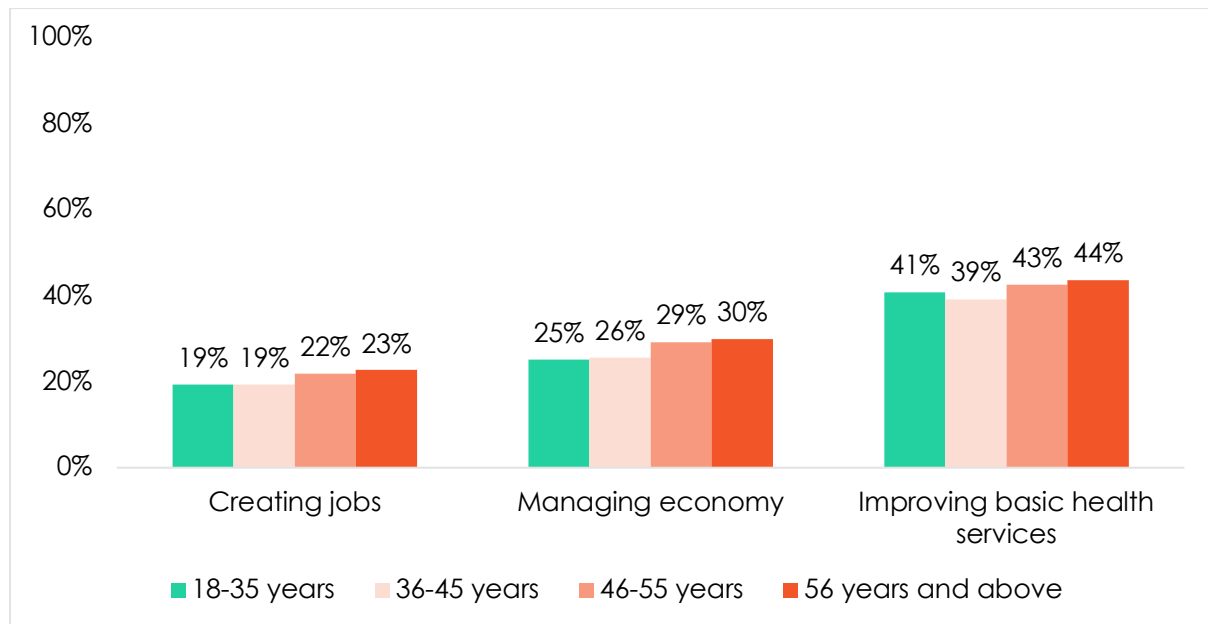
* The question about feeling close to a political party was not asked in Eswatini.

Figure 3: 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)

Figure 4 : 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")

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