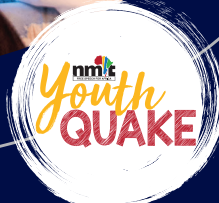


YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL AGENDA THROUGH MASS MEDIA



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This publication is a contribution by the Namibia Media Trust to the ongoing work of promoting youth participation in civic matters. It forms part of our youth development programme, the YouthQuake Namibia, designed to create a safe space for young people to develop greater understanding and skills to become agents of change – on a personal and societal level.

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1. Introduction

The role of the youth in any country's politics is a contentious issue that often revolves around negative and extreme scenarios. Kaplan (1996: 16) considers Africa's youth as "out of school, unemployed, loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatens to ignite". Others like Fuller (1995) and Goldstone (2010) argue that there is a definite link between a surfeit of young men and the likelihood of social and political unrest. They point to the fact that with fewer responsibilities and susceptible to radical ideas young men are more likely to be instigators of violence with potential to be recruited as soldiers into civil and political conflict.

Yet another school of thought such as that of Claire Wallace¹ points out that youth are no longer the political force they once were. Youth have become estranged from conventional politics and have become apathetic. They no longer vote or join political parties or pursue conventional political goals. Their political agendas have changed, and as Inglehart (1997) argues they have become "post-modern" or "post-material".

Those who look at the youth from a social welfare perspective often argue, using a set of negative assumptions, that youth are incapable of looking after themselves and require adults to set and implement their agenda.

It is these negative perceptions of youth that are usually responsible for their exclusion in development. Young people are also accused as the source of "democratic decline", as they have lower formal participation rates, especially in voting, but also of membership in key political institutions such as political parties.²

Thus, concern about the growing apathy among Namibia's youth and their declining levels of participation in conventional politics is not new. The Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) raised this issue prior to the 2014 Presidential and National Assembly elections.³

This paper will look at specific trends regarding participation of Namibia's youth in the political processes of the country. It will start by reviewing definitions of the term "youth" before moving on to present some key characteristics of the Namibian youth. The study will discuss Namibian youth's attitudes toward democracy before examining their political participation and civic action. The last section will interrogate youth's media usage before concluding and putting forward recommendations that will promote youth participation in the national agenda through mass media. The bulk of the data for the paper is drawn from eight rounds of the Afrobarometer survey conducted between 1999 and 2019.⁴

1 Wallace, C. (2003) Introduction: youth and politics, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6:3, 243-245, DOI: 10.1080/1367626032000138237

2 Chen P.J and M Stilianovic, (2020), New Media and Youth Political Engagement, *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* (2020) 3:241-254

3 Motsamai D. Elections and Youth. The Case of Namibia, ACE, https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/elections-and-youth/the-case-of-namibia/mobile_browsing/onePag

4 For more information about the Afrobarometer see <https://afrobarometer.org>

2. Defining the “Youth”

There is no standard definition of a “youth”. “Youth” is a social construction portraying different things to different segments of the population. Sociologically the concept “youth” is used to denote a stage between “childhood” and “adulthood”. For many United Nations organisations (see Table 1) childhood includes ages between 0 and 14 although some stretch it to 18 years. This enlarged category includes adolescents who fall between 10 and 19 years. Youth is defined by most as those of ages between 15 and 24 years.⁵

Table 1: Defining “Youth” - UN Agencies

Organisation	Age (Years)
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO Youth	15-24
UN Habitat Youth	15-32
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	15-24
African Youth Charter	15-35

In addition to the sociological definition, law, public policy, and social perception also offer definitions of youth.

Legally, laws may define adulthood to start at 18 or 21 years but there is great variance across countries regarding the legal age limit for marriage, consent to sexual intercourse, voting rights, criminal responsibility, military service, consent to medical treatment and so forth.

The 3rd Namibian National Youth Policy defines youth as those “between 15 and 34”⁶, whilst the African Youth Charter uses a slightly different criterion – 15 to 35. The Swapo Party of Namibia limits membership of their youth league to those between 18 and 35 years but also makes provision for pioneers between 6 and 17 years.

These policy and political organisations employ purposefully broad definitions of youth to incorporate young voters into their structures and party polity. Their definitions embrace varied categories of the youth, which in the case of Namibia, have been exposed to different socio-political and historical experiences.

⁵ <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

⁶ GRN, 2020, National Youth Policy: Mainstreaming Youth Development into the National Agenda 2020 - 2030 (3rd revision), Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Service: Windhoek



For instance, Namibians born before 1989 would have lived at a time when the South African colonial apartheid administration was still in place and would have experienced a period of heightened political conflict and violence. Those born after 1989 would have grown up in a different environment, one in which the achievements of the liberation struggle were realised. These “born-frees” therefore represent a political generation with very different political experiences than those of the previous generations.

For this paper and based on the scope of the survey data available, “youth” is defined as individuals between 18 and 35 years. To avoid treating youth as a homogeneous social cluster, this paper reports two youth categories: 18-25 and 26-35. Both groups are “benchmarked” against the population average on the selected variables to determine which of the reported trends and observations are unique to young people and which are shared across the population. Such an approach will make it possible to identify youth-specific features and recommendations.

3. Key features of the Youth

3.1. Urbanisation

Namibia’s population is youthful with approximately 37% of the population aged younger than 15 years and more than half (58%) below 25 years.⁷ Only about 5% are 65 years and older.

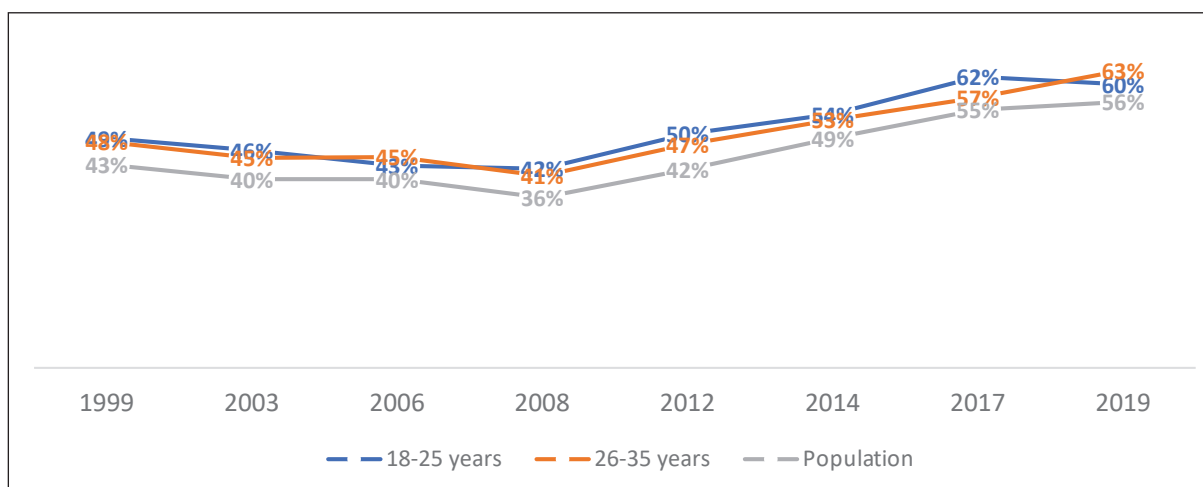
Most of Namibia’s population live in urban areas. The country’s urban population increased from 28% in 1991 to 33% in 2001, and then further to 43% in 2011. Olivier (2016: viii)⁸ reports that “between 2001 and 2011, the urban population grew by a staggering 49.7%, and the rural population shrank by 1.4%”. The current urban population is estimated to be more than 50% of the overall population (NSA 2014).⁹ Afrobarometer survey data shows that this number may be substantially higher, and that youth are present in urban areas at a higher-than-average rate (Figure 1). Much of this growth is attributed to demographic shifts in the form of rural-urban migration as the youth are moving to urban areas looking for employment and better education.

7 GRN, 2018, Towards Maximising the Demographic Dividend in Namibia: Demographic Dividend Study Report 2018, Windhoek.

8 Olivier, M. 2016. Migration in Namibia: A Country Profile 2015, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva, Switzerland.

9 Namibian Statistics Agency. 2014. Namibia: Population Projections 2011 -2041, NSA, Windhoek, Namibia

Figure 1: Youth in Urban Areas (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

With rapid urbanisation comes change. One such change is that urban areas become politically more important and even dominant. Social and cultural changes occur as levels of income and education increase. Urban areas experience a multitude of key problems that include high population densities, unplanned development, lack of land and basic services, informal settlements, and markets, rising unemployment, increases in crime, and significant housing shortages. As a result, new issues emerge, and new organisations are formed to deal with them.

The latest Local and Regional Elections held in 2020 show changes in the country's political landscape. New parties and organisations emerged to contest the elections held amidst a raging economic and health crisis caused by the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. In urban areas, the results favoured opposition parties and groups indicating perhaps a long-time change in the political landscape away from the ruling Swapo party. Namibia's youth stand central in this political landscape of change and could be a major political force soon if they manage to find suitable portals of inclusion into local politics.

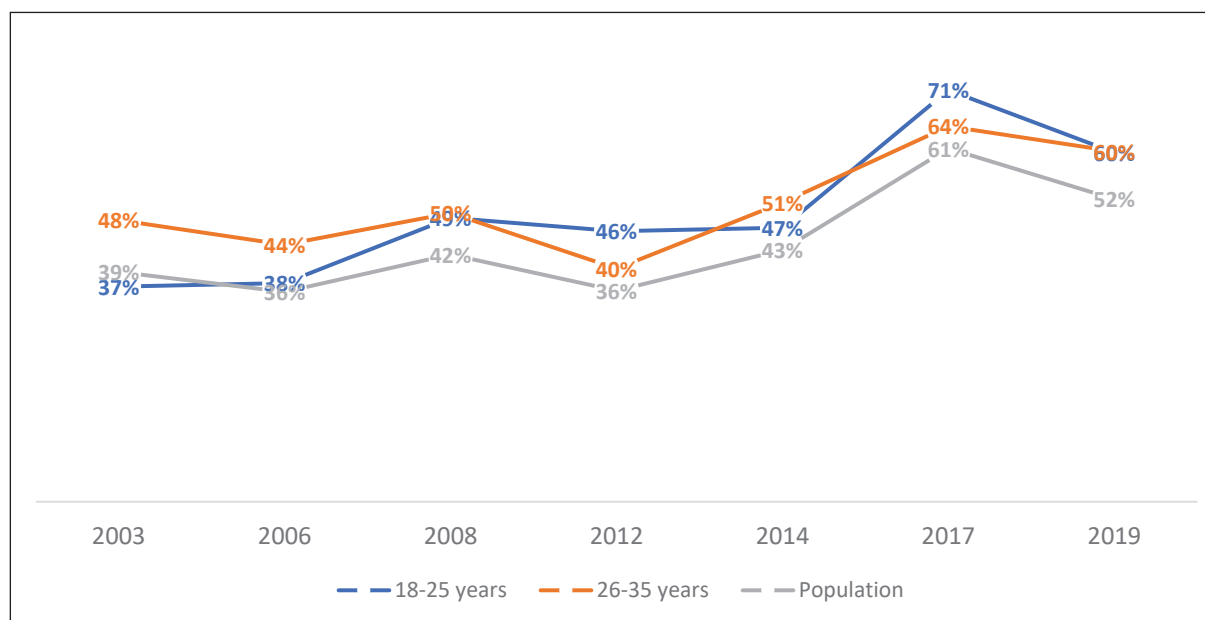
3.2. Education

Education is often considered an important variable in several political equations. It has been shown to have an important and positive influence on young voter turnout as well as on protest activities. Higher levels of education may allow individuals to better process complex political information and have a better sense of citizen responsibility. But the influence of education may not be consistent across the country or in political communities.



Figure 2 shows youth are generally better educated than the average Namibian. Both categories of youth exceed the national average for completed secondary school or tertiary education by eight percentage points.

Figure 2: Education - Secondary school and higher (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

3.3. Employment

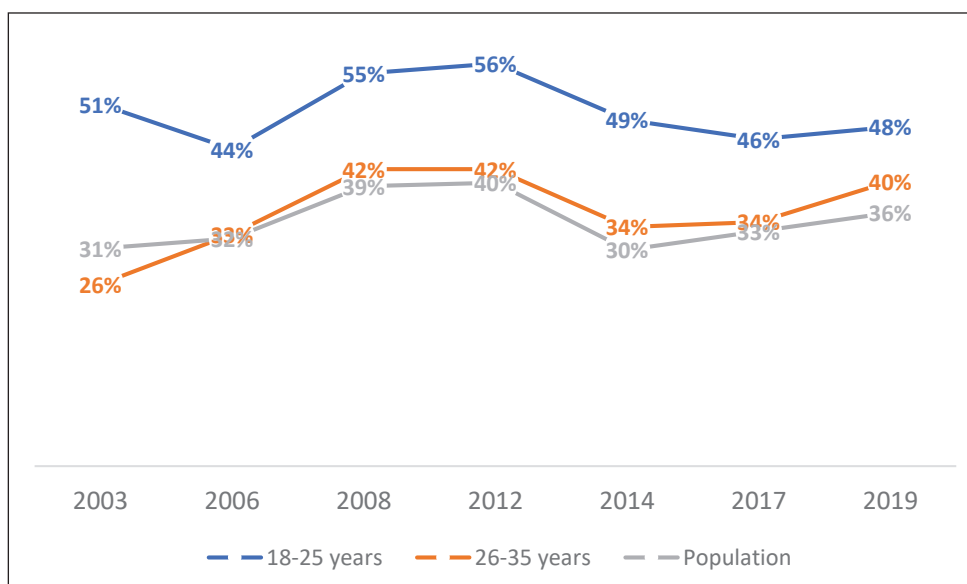
Namibia is a youthful country comprising approximately 36.8% youths (aged 15 to 34 years), and approximately 36.4% children (aged 0 to 15 years)¹⁰. The 2016 Labour Force Survey indicates that the overall youth unemployment rate was estimated to be 46.1%¹¹.

Figure 3 shows that unemployment among the 18-to-25-year-olds is consistently higher than for the 26-to-35-year-olds. The unemployment gap between the youngest cohort and the population average is consistently between 10 and 20 percentage points. The gap between the 26 to 35 cohort and the population average is much smaller, suggesting that youth unemployment is concentrated among the very young, which in turn suggests that there is great difficulty for individuals in this group to break into the job market.

¹⁰ NSA, 2017, Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016 Report, Namibia Statistics Agency, Windhoek

¹¹ NSA, 2019, The Namibia Labour Force Survey 2018 Report, Namibia Statistics Agency, Windhoek

Figure 3: Unemployed looking for work (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

The consequence of very high youth unemployment rates is that the theoretical young dependency age which is often stated as children below the age of 15, does not apply to Namibia. On average, young Namibians remain economically dependent until age 27. Many young Namibians who should be productive adults, are dependent well into their thirties because of a lack of work opportunities. This has serious implications for Namibia in terms of reaping the demographic dividend¹² (Towards a Demographic Dividend for Namibia, 2018).

4. Attitudes toward democracy

It has been argued that new democracies will become consolidated democracies when citizens no longer consider alternative forms of governance. By then democracy will be seen as the “only game in town”. This notion is based on the famous “Churchill hypothesis” which is derived from his famous quote: “Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

Figure 4 shows that support for democracy peaked in 2014 when overall 76% of Namibians of voting age said that democracy is always preferable. There was no significant difference among the two youth cohorts and the population overall. The picture changed drastically after 2014.

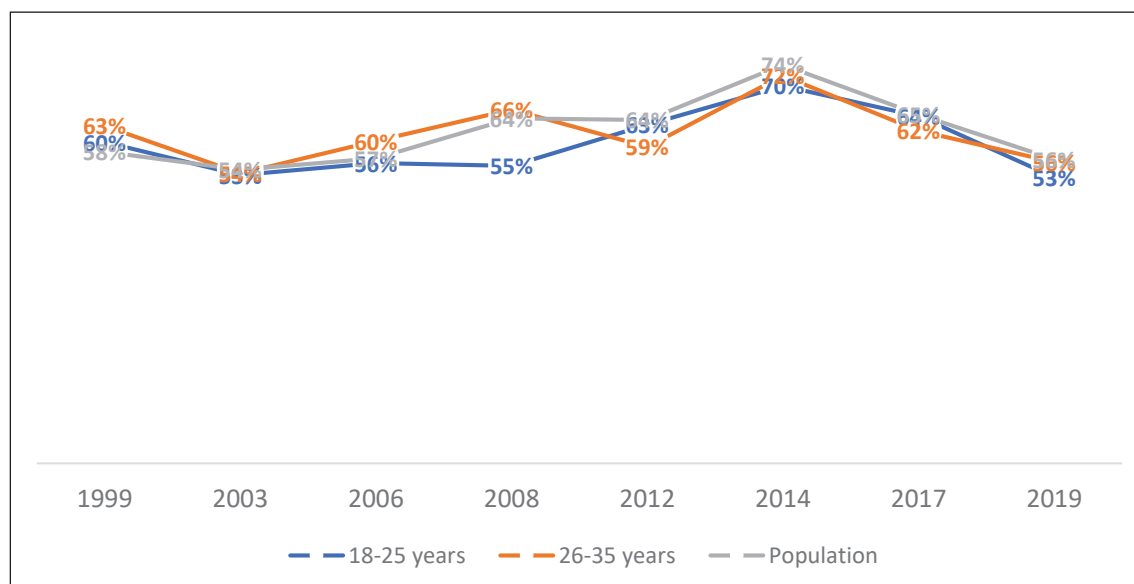
¹² GRN, 2018, Towards Maximising the Demographic Dividend in Namibia: Demographic Dividend Study Report 2018, Windhoek.



Overall support for democracy declined with 20% points to its lowest level yet (56%). It was slightly lower among the 18-25 cohort (53%), but the youth closely followed the overall downward trend in support for democracy observed throughout the general population since 2014.

During this period those who are non-committals and non-democrats increased to their highest ever levels. In 2019, 27% of the youngest cohort “did not care” what political system they would have, and 16% felt that sometimes non-democratic alternatives might be preferable.

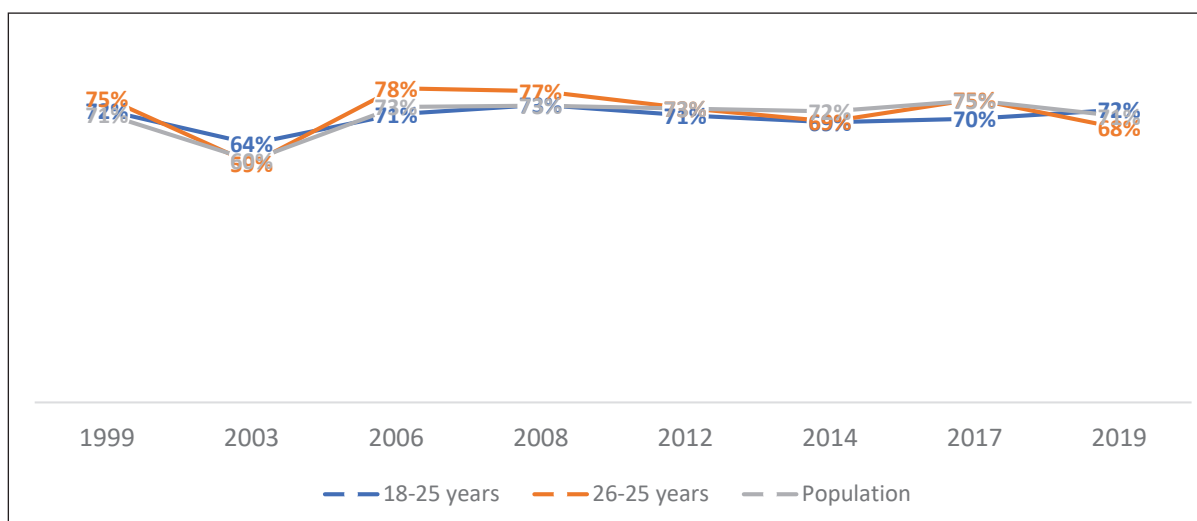
Figure 4: Democracy Always Preferable (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

Figure 5 shows that the Namibian youth, like the rest of the population, have high regard for the quality of the country's democracy. Well over two-thirds of both the youth cohort and the overall population believe the country is either a full democracy or a democracy with minor problems. Roughly 4 in 10 Namibians believe the country is a democracy with minor problems, whilst around one in three believed the country is a full democracy. These trends have remained consistent over the 20-year period.

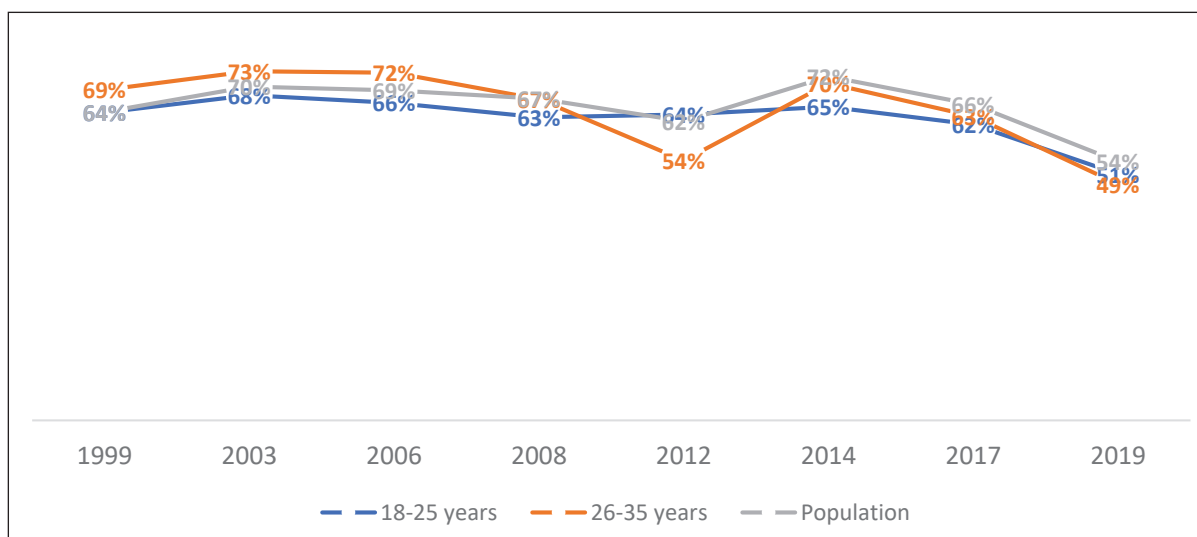
Figure 5: Extent of Democracy (full democracy/democracy with minor problems (%))



Source: Afrobarometer

Figure 6 shows that satisfaction with democracy closely followed the same trajectory as preference for democracy. The gap between the youth cohorts and the overall population is very small and statistically insignificant. Overall, just more than half the population is satisfied with Namibia's democracy, despite the fact that around seven-in-ten rate the quality of democracy as of high order. This suggests that the quality of democracy is not sufficient to explain satisfaction with democracy.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with Democracy (% very/fairly satisfied)



Source: Afrobarometer

Overall young Namibians' attitudes toward democracy are not significantly different from those of the overall population. Their attitudinal shifts are mirrored in that of the overall population. Currently, they are equally low in their support for democracy and equally high in their dissatisfaction with democracy.



5. Political participation

Political participation refers to activities by citizens that are aimed at influencing the selection and decisions of government personnel (Verba et al. 1978). This includes both formal activities, such as voting in elections, as well as more informal activities, such as meeting with community members, contacting political representatives, or involvement in collective action.

Protest activities tend to occur when people want policymakers to address pressing social, economic, or political concerns in a timely fashion than other modes of participation might allow. Odds for protest increase if, and when, other forms of participation like voting fail to deliver on expectations for change, causing more frustration and urgency.

5.1. Closeness to political parties

Political parties are key institutions in any democracy. Not only do they put forward candidates and programmes for elections, but they are key in organising and mobilising citizens around important issues. Different parties present different ideological and policy choices to prospective voters and it is their job to get voters to execute their preferences during elections.

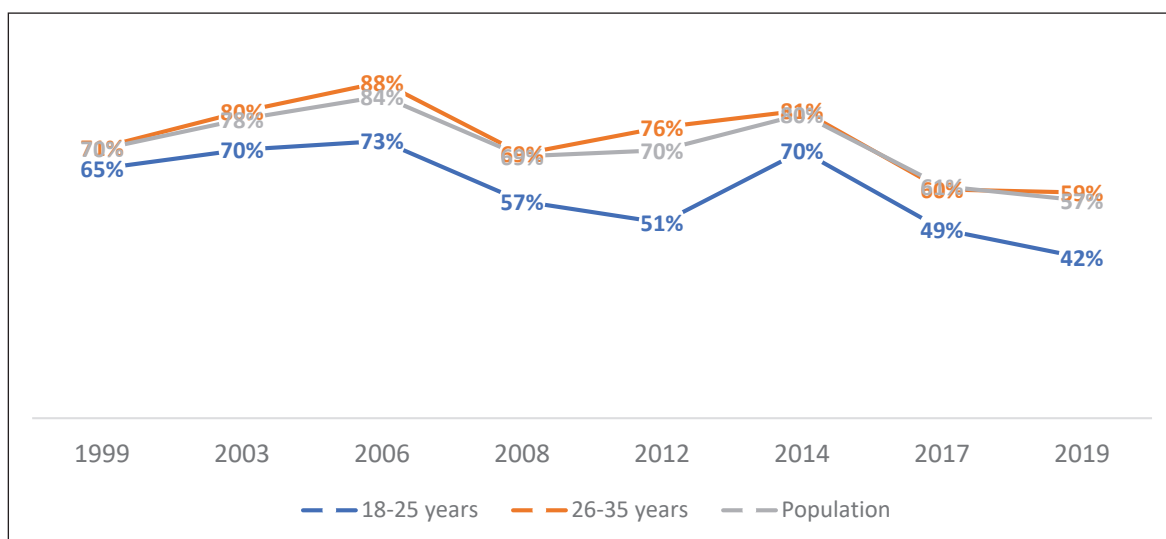
Partisan attachments, or how closely someone feels to a particular party, indicate whether parties express concerns meaningful to voters and often provide predictable indicators of future voting behaviour.

In more recent times some of the other less commonly emphasised functions of political parties became clear.

Political parties have the duty to protect the democratic regime and system from non-democratic forces looking to use democratic means to undermine the democratic system. Political parties must therefore vet candidates and leaders for their suitability to maintain and grow the country's democratic dispensation, and they must act to counter and oust prospective despots and demagogues seeking to replace democracy with some populist non-democratic alternative.

Democracy suffers when parties become weak, when the linkages between parties and citizens deteriorate or break down. Citizens may react on their discontent with parties by suspending membership, switching to or voting for opposing parties or they may stop voting altogether. Citizens not feeling close to political parties is a sign that the linkage between a society and its political system has broken down.

Figure 7: Feeling Close to a Political Party



Source: Afrobarometer

Closeness to a political party is lowest among the youngest section of the adult Namibian society. In 2019, only 43% of Namibians between 18 and 25 years felt close to a party, and that number was 26% less than it was in 2014. At the opposite end of the scale, 67% of those 56 years and older felt close to a political party in 2019. This number was 20% lower than in 2014.

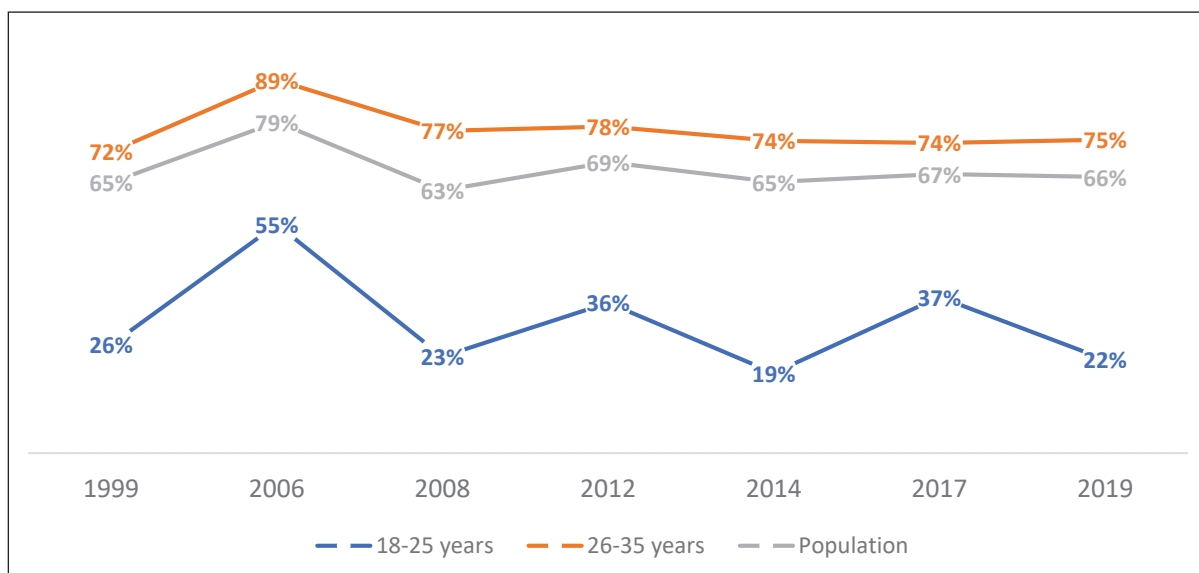
5.2. Voting

Voting is arguably the most important form of political participation in any democracy. Although voting alone does not make a polity a democracy. Similarly, no polity can be a democracy without free and fair elections and universal suffrage. The decision to vote expresses whether individuals view elections as a meaningful way of expressing preferences with respect to how their country is managed.

Figure 8 shows a huge age gap regarding voting. The 18-25 cohort were far less likely to vote than the 26-35 cohort who were more likely to vote than the general population. Voting turnout among the 18-25 cohort is an up and down affair. In 2019, only one-in-five (22%) of Namibians this age voted. The gap between this cohort and the 25-36 cohort was 53%.



Figure 8: Voted in Last Elections (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

There is a clear disconnect between the youngest cohort of the Namibian youth and the country's party system. Not only does this segment of the youth display low levels of party attachment, but they also abstain from voting. This group does not seem to find a credible voice among the current crop of parties and as such shows little affinity for any of the development programmes on offer. Resnick and Casale (2011)¹³ argue that this may be the result of a generational gap that opened up after Independence: "At the same time, the changing nature of party systems in many African countries would lead us to expect that attachments to incumbents may have waned for younger generations. Indeed, many of today's youth were most likely too young to have engaged in the pro-democracy movements prior to the 1990s and therefore are possibly less enamoured with the political parties at the forefront of those movements which, in many cases, are now dominant in their respective countries."¹⁴

This group will not participate unless they find a political home that will provide them the right incentive to vote and have their say in how the country should be governed.

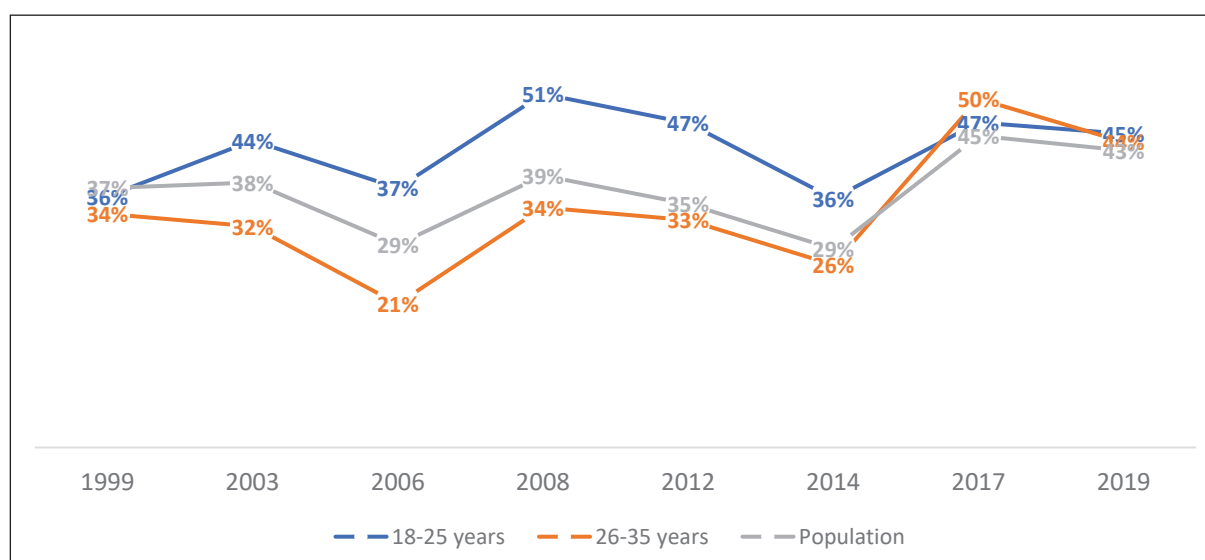
13 Resnick D and D Casale, 2011, The political participation of Africa's youth: turnout, partisanship and protest, Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 136.

14 Resnick D and D Casale, 2011, The political participation of Africa's youth: turnout, partisanship and protest, Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 136.

5.3. Discussing Politics

The frequency with which an individual discusses politics is often an indication of that individual's level of interest in politics. Higher levels of interest are often associated with higher levels of participation in politics. Compared to other forms of participation in politics, discussing politics is a low-cost activity that most individuals can engage in without any real risk.

Figure 9: Never Discuss Politics (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

Figure 9 shows that overall, the proportion of the Namibian population who never discuss politics has increased from 1999 to 2019. Between 2003 and 2014 the 18-25 cohort recorded the highest number of individuals that never discussed politics, with the 26-35 cohort recording significantly lower numbers of individuals that never discussed politics. From 2014 onward the trend changed rapidly and significantly as the number of individuals never discussing politics increased for both youth cohorts and for the overall population, pointing perhaps to an overall decline in interest in politics as well. In 2019 there was no longer any age gap in this regard.

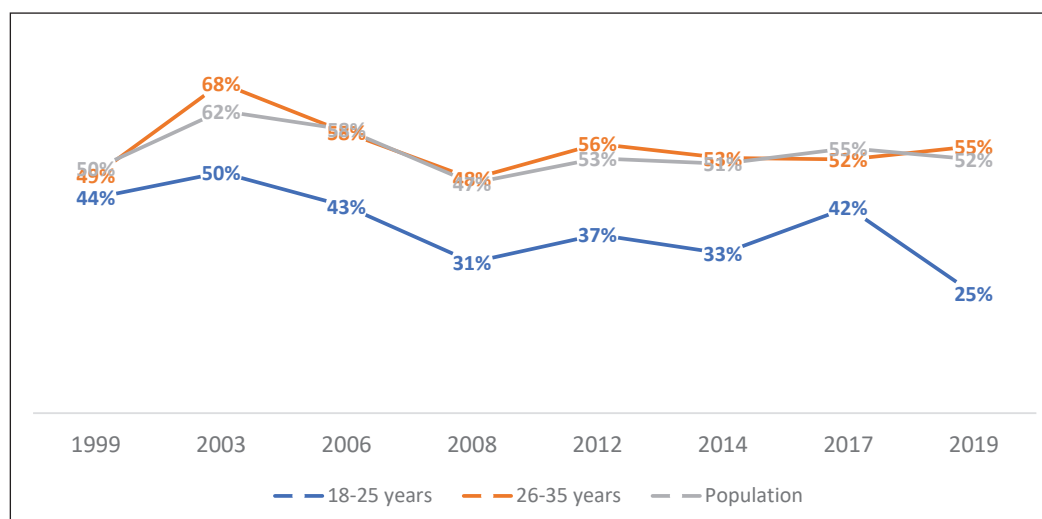
5.4. Civic Action

Another important platform through which citizens can engage their political system is civil society, i.e., organisations that operate between the family and the state. Often referred to as non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, or voluntary associations, these could be operational bodies (i.e., organisations that design and implement developmental projects) or advocacy organisations (i.e., organisations which defend or promote a specific cause and/or seek to influence public policy).



Attending community meetings is a low-risk cost form of civic action. Figure 10 shows that the 18-25 cohort are less likely to participate in community meetings than their older counterparts and the population in general. It also shows that the participation rate among the youngest cohort has declined by about half, between 2003 and 2019, whilst it remained consistent for the 26-35 cohort and the general population.

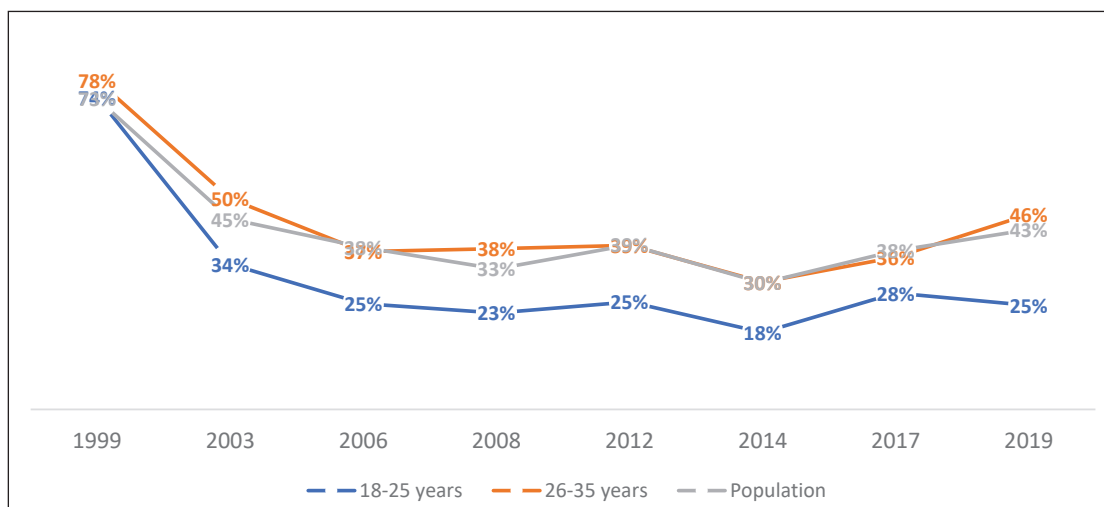
Figure 10: Attend a community meeting at least once (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

Joining others to raise an issue is an action aimed at shaping the political and policy agenda at national or sub-national level. Figure 11 shows a sharp decline in this activity since 1999. The decline is most significant among the 18-25 cohort. Between 1999 and 2019 the proportion of Namibians who joined others to raise an issue at least once declined with close to 50%. Furthermore, the gap between this cohort and the average population remained consistent from 2003 onward. The 26-35 cohort for most part followed the profile of the overall population. With only one-in-four members of the 18-25 cohort joining others to raise an issue at least once, further evidence is provided that the youngest youth cohort has withdrawn from the political and public space.

Figure 11: Join others to raise an issue at least once (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

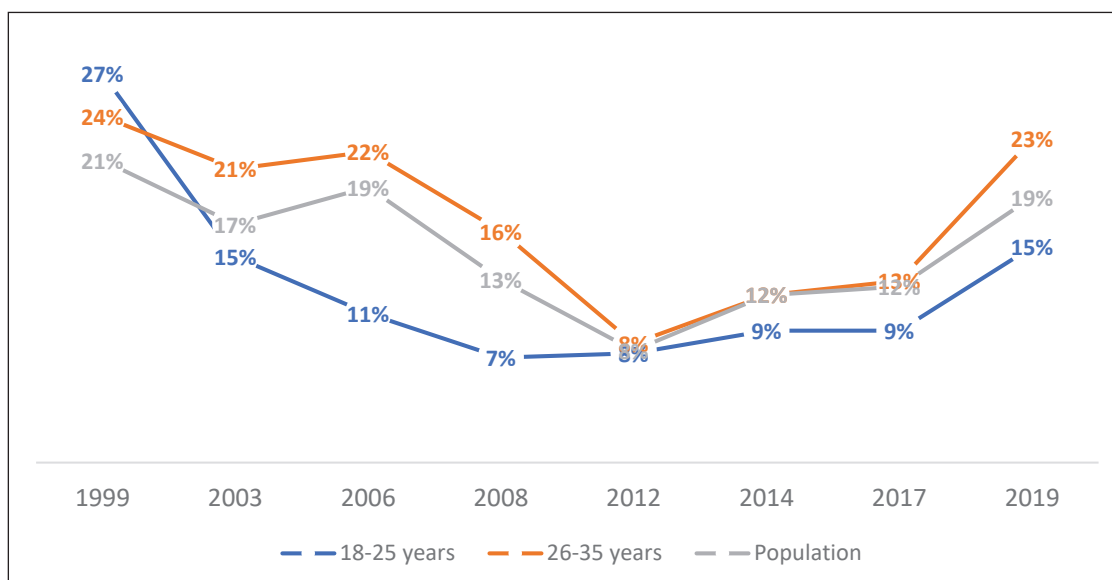
Taking part in political or public protest is a potentially high-cost activity. Potential costs include risking one's personal safety and possibly facing arrest and even detention. Yet the youth is often associated with political protest and is thus deemed a disruptive and irresponsible political force. Several studies have found that the presence of high numbers of unemployed young men increases the prospects for political protest (see Kaplan 1996; Fuller 1995; Goldstone 2010).

Figure 12 shows that participation in a protest or demonstration is low for both youth cohorts and the population at large in Namibia. In 2019, close to one-in-five Namibians (19%) participated in a protest event at least once. Those in the 18-25 cohort participated at lower levels (15%) whilst those aged 26 to 35 years participated at a slightly higher-than-average rate (23%).

Figure 12 also shows that participation in protests was not constant. Between 1999 and 2012 participation in protests by both age cohorts and the adult population declined sharply. In 2012, less than one-in-10 Namibians, including the youth, participated in a demonstration or protest. Since then, participation in protest increased again close to 2006. The youngest cohort went from the highest level of participation (27%) of all in 1999 to the lowest in 2019 (15%). This cohort has less-than-average protest experience, and as such has not chosen protest as an alternative way of influencing public policy as some may have argued. It is only recently (2019) that the 25-36 cohort participated in protests at higher-than-average rates.



Figure 12: Joined a demonstration or protest march at least once (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

6. Public policy preferences

Adult perceptions of the youth are validated by an ideology of dominance. Politically, adults tend to want to define and limit the youth's responsibilities, opportunities, and status. Youth are often excluded from decision-making positions as they are perceived as irresponsible and reckless. Young people are seen as presenting problems which need to be solved through the intervention of older people who "know what is best".

This raises the question of policy preferences. Policy preferences are often expressed as the most urgent problems that need to be solved to bring about a better state of public affairs. Does the youth want the same as their elders, or do they have a different agenda from that of the society at large?

Figure 13 provides an overview of the most urgent policy problems identified by Namibians during the 8th round of the Afrobarometer survey and breaks it down by age cohorts.

Overall, unemployment is seen by all age groups as the most important policy problem, but it is a bigger priority for the two youth cohorts than for older cohorts. Within the 18-25 cohort (57%) and 26-35 cohorts (64%) unemployment is the most important problem, followed by drought (32% and 24% respectively) and education (25% and 21%). For those aged 65 and older drought (49%), unemployment (44%) and water supply (29%) are the three most important policy issues. Poverty is a near equal priority for all age cohorts whilst education is a bigger priority for the younger cohorts. But it is difficult to identify a youth agenda that is distinct and substantively different from that of older generations.

From the data in Figure 13 it appears that even though there may be different nuances, Namibians of all ages mostly favour the same policy agenda.

Figure 13: Most important problems -2019 (%)

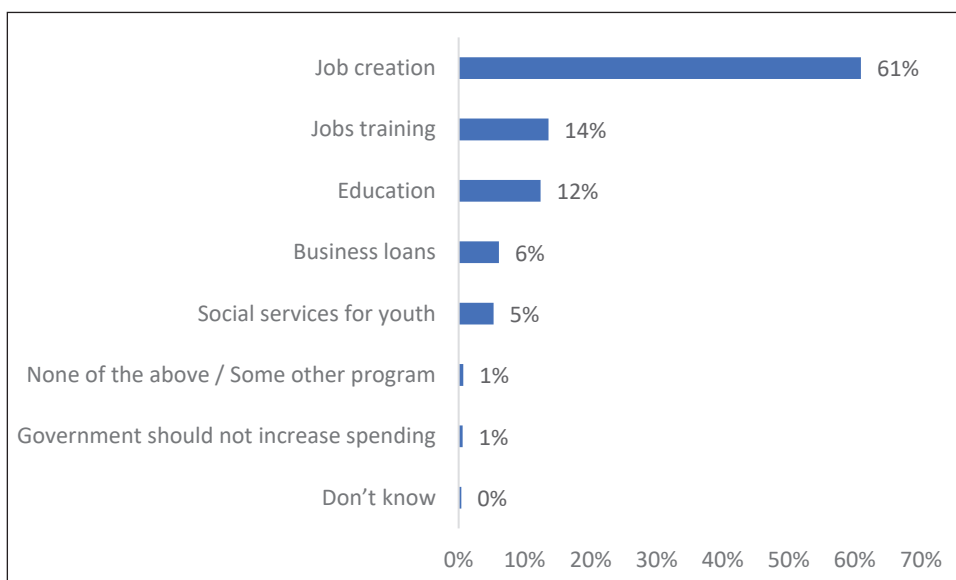


Source: Afrobarometer

The 2019 Round 8 Afrobarometer survey included a question that probed priorities for increased public spending on youth programmes. Figure 14 shows that the response to this question confirms the findings presented in Figure 13. Most Namibians (61%) confirm job creation as the most important priority for public investments in the youth. Second and third most important priorities for spending on youth programmes are training (14%) and education (12%).



Figure 14: Priorities for public spending on Youth

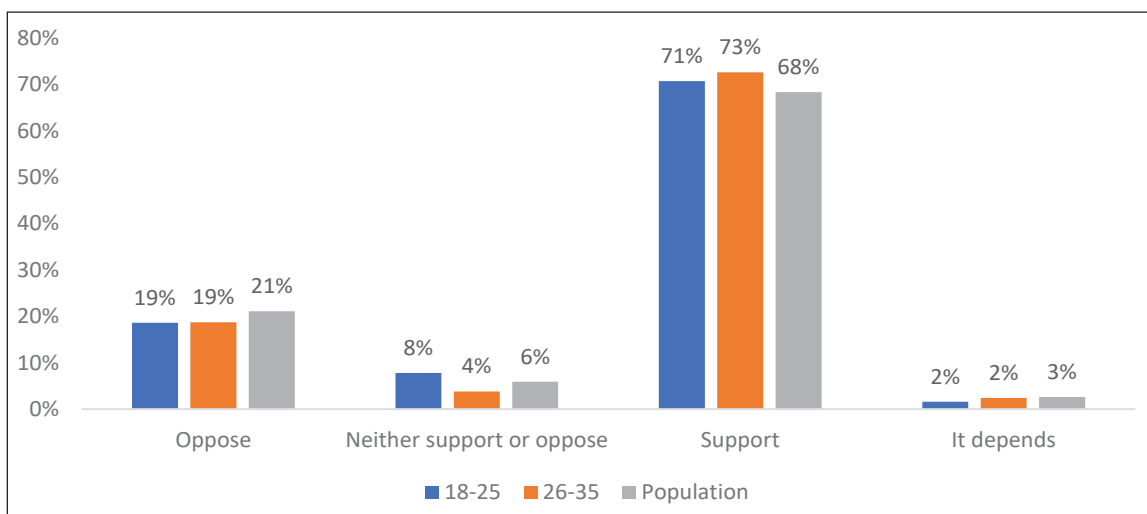


Source: Afrobarometer

Most Namibians (68%) would support additional taxes to fund youth-related support programmes and only 21% would oppose it.

Figure 15 presents a breakdown of this support by age cohort. It shows that the gap between the youth and the general population both in support and opposition to increased taxes for youth-related programmes is quite small.

Figure 15: Support for additional taxes to support youth programmes



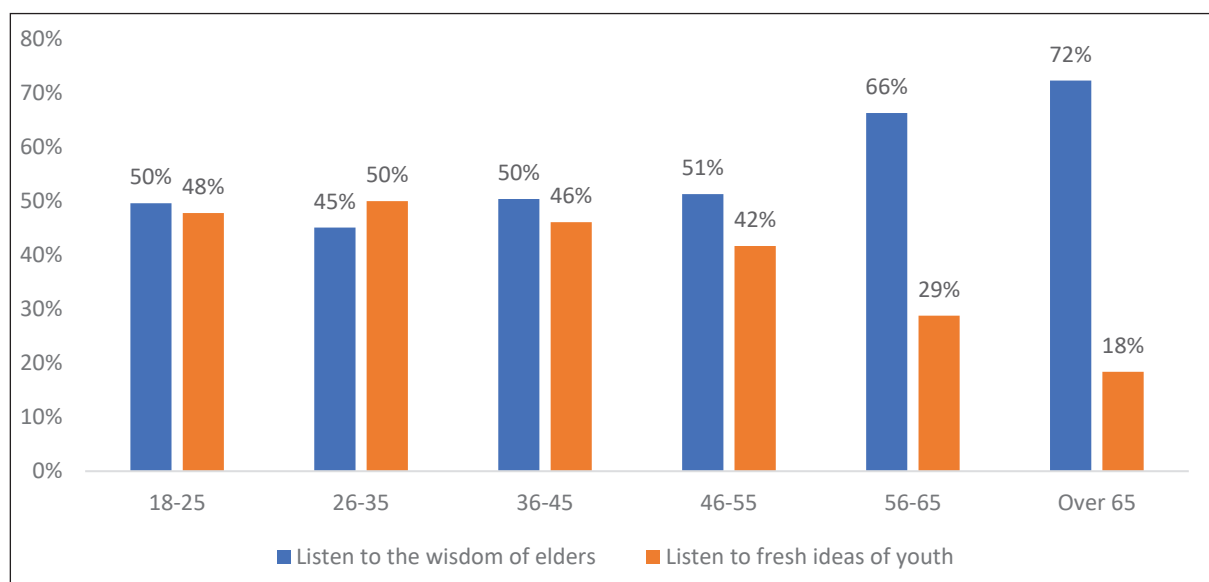
Source: Afrobarometer

7. Youth in policy positions

The Namibian population is divided over the question of whose inputs would be best for the country. Just more than half (51%) felt it would be in the country's interest to listen to the wisdom of the elders, whilst 45% felt that fresh ideas from the youth would be more beneficial.

Figure 16 shows that these views are closely linked to the age of the respondent. Older respondents, especially those older than 56 years are less in favour of inputs from the youth. On the other hand, both youth cohorts are divided on the issue, thus echoing the views of the nation overall.

Figure 16: Support for wisdom of elders versus fresh ideas from the youth



Source: Afrobarometer

During his second term in office President Hage Geingob appointed 25-year-old Emma Theophilus to the position of Deputy-Minister of Information and Communication Technology and 22-year-old Patience Masua as a member of Namibia's 7th National Assembly. Similarly, Utaara Mootu (25) of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) and Tjekupe Maximilliant Katjimune (23) of the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) were also elected to the 7th National Assembly.¹⁵

Although some may view the presence of these individuals as a move in the right direction for the youth, the impact of these individuals on a possible "youth agenda" is unlikely as there are no channels that will allow for youth matters to be brought into the national agenda. For example, the National Assembly does not have a standing committee on the youth and none of the youthful members form part of any of the existing standing committees.

¹⁵ Katjimune never served in the Assembly, as he, together with others, was removed from the party's list after the 2019 National Assembly elections. The court case on the legality of the matter is still not concluded.



Furthermore, President Geingob made both his appointments without consultation with the Swapo party's youth league and neither individual represents any specific youth constituency. It is thus difficult to see how they will promote a youth agenda.

8. Media consumption

Public awareness of social, economic, and political issues pertinent to the country should ideally stimulate a greater involvement in various modes of political participation. It should help to combat corruption and keep governments accountable. Information gained from the mass media could also reduce voters' reliance on traditional social identities and increase their ability to choose freely which parties to support (see Norris 2004).

However, access to the media does not reveal what type of information actually is absorbed. Some scholars have noted that in developed countries, people who watch television as opposed to reading the newspaper demonstrate lower levels of political engagement (e.g., Milner 2002; Putnam 1995). Norris (1996) observes that television's impact on political participation can be beneficial if news programmes are the main form of media engagement.

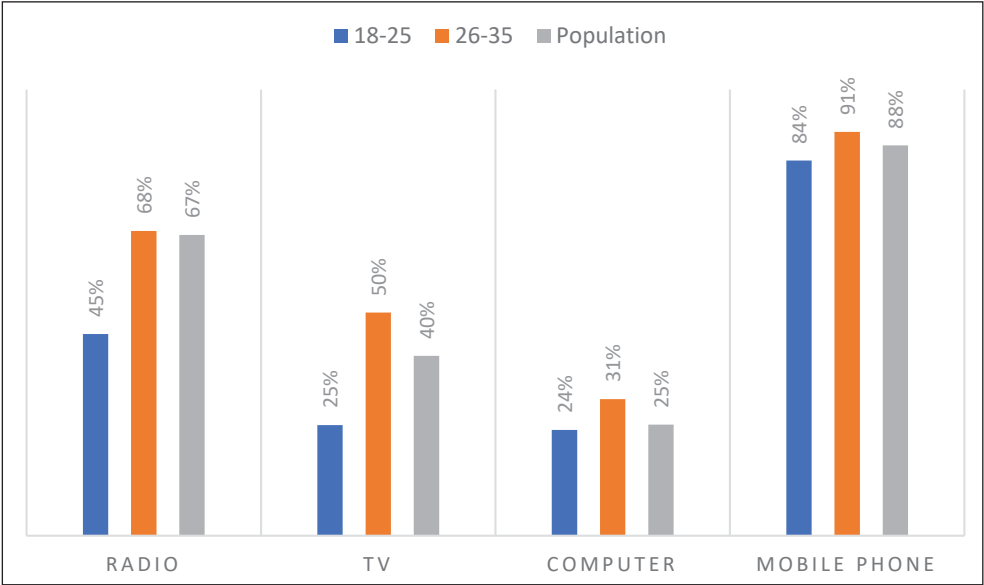
In Africa, however, newspaper circulation remains lower than access to the radio, often due to low literacy rates and the cost of newspapers (see Bratton and van de Walle 1997). Moreover, government ownership of the media continues to be relatively high in some countries, and this causes citizens to receive biased information that favours incumbents. But despite the biases, Moehler and Singh (2011) show that Africans trust the government media more than independent broadcasters. With the inception of new media, Africans now have access to many more forms of independent and international information, especially through mobile phones and the internet.

8.1. Ownership of devices

In the modern digital world, access to media is facilitated by access to devices. Figure 17 provides an overview of device ownership which may be important for understanding the appropriate channels through which to reach the youth. It shows that the 18-25 cohort lags in ownership of all four types of devices: radio, TV, computers, and mobile phones. The 26-35 cohort on the other hand leads ownership of all four devices and their ownership levels are higher than the average for all Namibian adults.



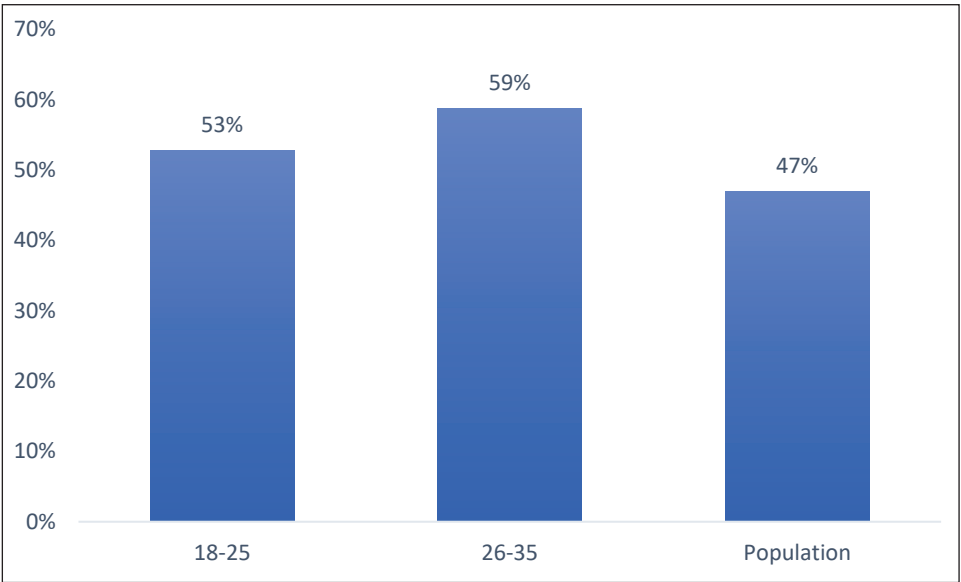
Figure 17: Ownership of devices (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

Most Namibians now own a mobile phone. Of these with a mobile phone, the two youth cohorts have more access to the internet from their devices compared with the average Namibian. Some 53% of the 18-25 cohort with a mobile phone have access to the internet, whilst even more, 59%, of the 26-35 cohort have access from their mobile phones. This is substantially higher than the 47% that represents the population at large.

Figure 18: Mobile phone with internet

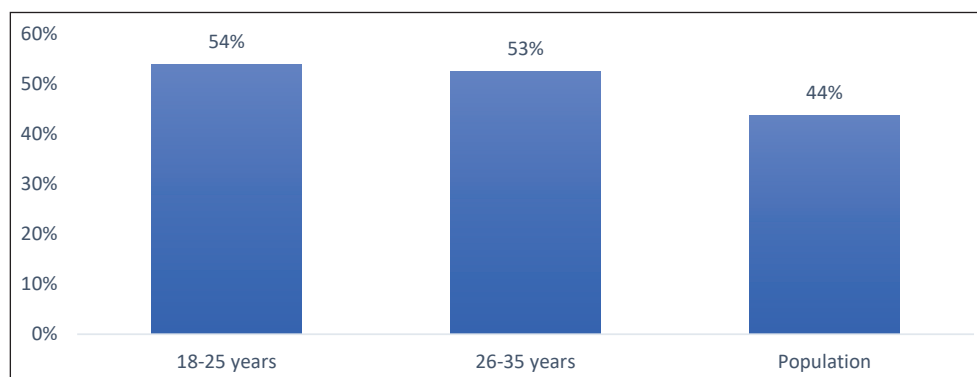


Source: Afrobarometer



Figure 19 shows that both youth cohorts use the internet more frequently than the population at large. The 18-25 cohort is the most frequent user of the internet with 54% using the internet daily or a few times a week, whilst 53% of the 26-35 cohort use it with nearly the same frequency. Both these cohorts outperform society at large (44%).

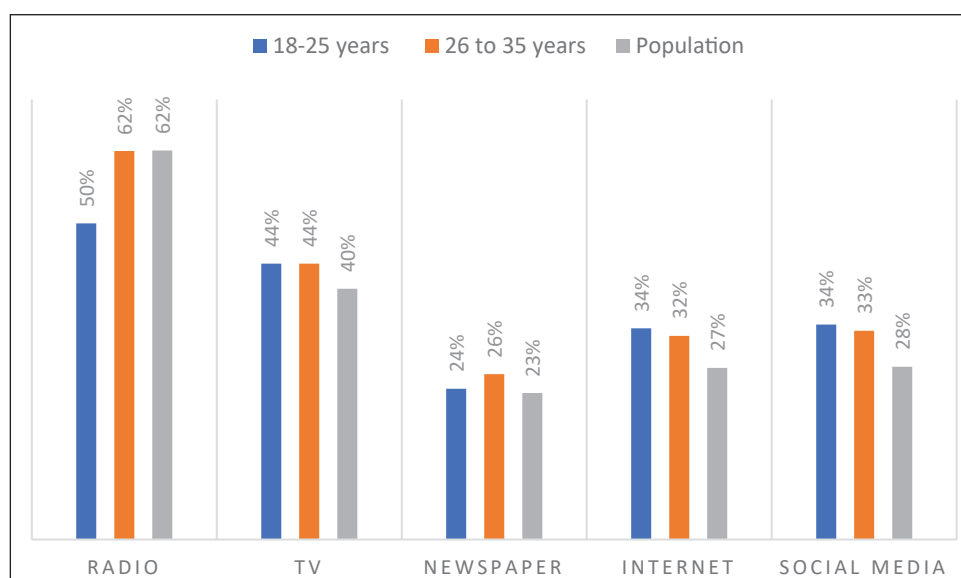
Figure 19: Internet usage - daily or a few times a week (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

Having access to the internet and digital media does not necessarily mean that it is the most preferred news source. Figure 20 shows that both age cohorts, as well as the nation at large, prefer radio and television as their source for daily news. The internet and social media are less frequently used to obtain daily news and so are newspapers. The latter is the least attractive source for both 18-25- and 26-35-year-old Namibians.

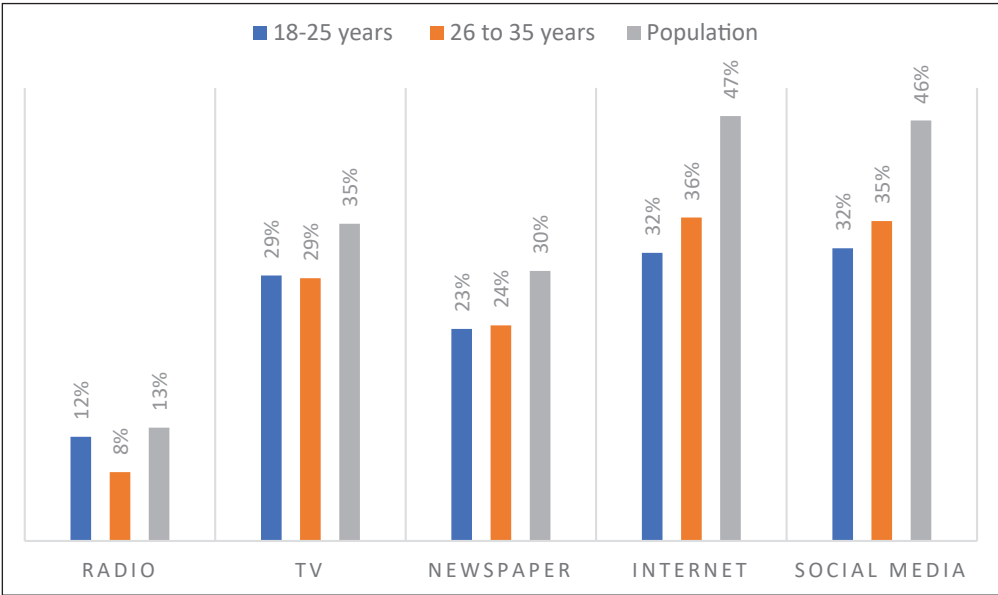
Figure 20: Daily source of news (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

Figure 21 presents data on which types of media is never used for news. It confirms the findings of Figure 17 in that the internet and social media are not the youth's most preferred sources of news. In fact, close to one-in-three young Namibians *never* use the internet nor social media to obtain their daily news. Only about one-in-five never use newspapers; slightly more – about three-in-ten – never use TV as a source for news.

Figure 21: Media never used as source for daily news (%)



Source: Afrobarometer

Chen and Stilinovic (2020) point to the fact “that new media, and particularly social media, are not democratic by nature. Their general use and adoption by young and older people do not necessarily cultivate democratic values. This is primarily due to the type of participation afforded in the emerging ‘surveillance economy’”¹⁶. (Milner 2010).

In the compulsory voting context of Australia, Print (2015) highlights the focus on young people as a state educational project to become “active and informed citizens”. Which, in the context of today’s technologically-driven political environment, would garner access to political discourse, engagement, and the use of advancing technologies to communicate, coordinate and mobilise.

¹⁶ Chen P.J and M Stilinovic, 2020, New Media and Youth Political Engagement, Journal of Applied Youth Studies (2020) 3



9. Conclusions

Namibia has a youthful population that lives predominantly in urban areas. Although Namibia's youth are better educated than the society at large, their immediate economic prospects are bleak and characterised by higher-than-average unemployment rates. Yet, despite much evidence of *youth-at-risk*, there is little evidence, thus far at least, of the *youth-at-risk* in Namibia

Van Dijk and others¹⁷ warn against portraying the youth as being in an “oxymoronic state of constant crisis”. Therefore, if the Namibian youth were to reflect on their situation, how will they define their current situation? A state of crisis, or a normal situation? The answer to this question may well explain the youth's participation in politics or lack thereof.

The levels to which Namibia's youth participates in the country's public affairs depends to some extent on how the youth is defined. Throughout this paper evidence has been presented that the 18-25 cohort participates at lower levels than the slightly older 26-35 cohort.

Namibia's youth are no different from the population at large regarding their attitudes toward democracy. Preference for democracy is declining among the youth and the general population and although the quality of Namibia's democracy is rated very positively, satisfaction with democracy is also on a downward slope. This trend is possibly caused by the system's failure to “deliver the economic goods”.

In comparison with the population at large, Namibia's youth tend to vote less and express a lower level of partisanship, which is consistent with findings for the youth in other regions of the world. However, not all of Namibia's youth are more likely to protest than older citizens. Collectively, these findings cast doubt that the youth are more likely to turn to the street when they are disgruntled, but still question the legitimacy of the electoral process as a meaningful conduit for conveying the preferences of Namibia's youth.

Given these findings that point to a growing schism between the youth and conventional institutions, one has to question the success of efforts at “encadrement” of the youth through party youth leagues and institutions such as the National Youth Service (NYS).

Evidence is presented that shows that despite the youth's focus on unemployment, drought, and education as the three most recent problems to be solved, their public policy agenda is not different from that of the society at large. Therefore, at the moment, there is no distinguishable youth agenda that could be used to mobilise the youth back into the political space. This opens possibilities for political agencies, such as political parties, to intertwine their own, non-youth specific agendas with that of the youth to enhance their electoral appeal.

17 Van Dijk R, (et.al.), 2011, Introduction: Ideologies of Youth, Africa Development, Vol. XXXVI, Nos 3 & 4

A non-authentic youth agenda combined with co-opted leadership or tokenism as is present in Namibia today will not advance the youth's participation nor satisfy their political aspirations in the long run. If anything, it will widen the rift between the youth and the country's political institutions.

Young Namibians are well equipped to access digital media, and their higher-than-average use of the internet and social media, is expected. Perhaps less expected is the fact that these digital sources are not necessarily their most preferred for daily news. This means that traditional media, and most specifically radio and TV remain important channels for reaching the youth.

10. Recommendations

1 Opportunity

Namibia's youth need a voice in conventional politics. Their disengagement from the political and public policy sphere must be addressed. Special focus should particularly be on the 18-25 cohort. Politically this group is inexperienced and disinterested and economically they are under enormous pressure because of unemployment. This is a group that is losing its political voice as is evident from their low partisanship. With conventional political agencies no longer capable of mobilising this group, opportunities for mass media to fill or shape this void can open up. These may well be in the form of "youthscapes", i.e., landscapes of action and interaction that can be used to act out their identities or define their own youth-driven agendas.

2 Opportunity

Namibia does not have a civic education course in its public or private school system that prepares and conditions its youth for life as an active citizen once they leave school. There are only a few civil society organisations that do consistent programmes targeting the youth and their participation in politics. Donor funding for such programmes is hard to come by as most international donors in Namibia no longer target and support democracy, good governance, or human rights-related issues. This opens opportunities for mass media campaigns that can deliver targeted messages more accurately and at low cost.

3 Opportunity

Advances in access to digital media have opened new avenues to reach the youth. More opportunities for engaging the youth exist as traditional media outlets have moved into multi-media production that includes new content across several types of media. This has helped facilitate public participation in sharing and distributing content. It has also reduced the costs of content creation and built new opportunities for content-rich networks to be developed. The current project linking *The Namibian* to community radio stations around Covid-19 is one such example of a content-rich network.



1 Recommendation

Content that engages the 18-25 cohort is most important. There is a need to develop a civic education course that covers the basic elements of democracy, citizenship, and civic engagement. Course contents should promote knowledge of government and political processes, participants' sense of civic duty and political efficacy. The content should be delivered in various formats - podcasts, columns, talk-shows, blogs, and vlogs - suitable for both traditional and social media. As such the media will help to establish and shape distinct "youthscapes" forged by modern media and new modes of communication.

2 Recommendation

Low levels of organisational membership (e.g., political parties) means that the youth will not become engaged in politics through institutional membership. Social media presents opportunities to establish online identities, broaden social networks, and conduct outreach and mobilisation. All of which will benefit programmes designed to engage Namibia's youth. Moreover, it creates opportunities for the youth to "co-produce" political content, something traditional media cannot do. It would thus be beneficial to explore ways through which social media platforms can be used to engage the 18-25 cohort, not just to learn about politics and civic matters, but to allow them to participate in conceptualising on-line information production, consumption, and exchange of content on social media platforms.

3 Recommendation

Media literacy, or the ability to encode, decode, analyse, and produce mediated messages in Namibia is assumed but not proven. In the absence of research and data on the topic it is recommended that media literacy be studied and promoted. As is the case with a civics curriculum, it is suggested that a media literacy campaign be worked out that will emphasise and promote a broad set of skills to deal with the different media messages to promote media literacy among the youth. Not all youth are "digital natives". We recognise that media literacy is a matter of citizenship and inclusion, which is needed to decrease the risk of exclusion from public or community life.

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Christiaan Keulder is a research specialist with more than 25 years' experience with both qualitative and quantitative research projects in Namibia and Southern Africa. He has consulted widely and led many high-profile research teams working on projects in a number of fields that include HIV/AIDS, Public Health, Monitoring and Evaluation, Traditional Leadership, Elections, Democracy and Markets, Financial Inclusion, Financial Capability, Organisation Change, Gender and Financial Education. He is an expert in the technical, conceptual and content development of large survey projects, with special skills in the analysis of large datasets. His publications include three academic books, a number of book chapters and numerous research reports. Most recently he completed three studies looking at the impact of Covid-19 on Namibian businesses and households.







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