

International Youth Day: Unemployment and education are Ghanaian youth's most important problems

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 382 | Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny

Summary

Almost 60% of Africa's population is under the age of 25, making the continent the world's youngest (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019). Africa's youthful population is a tale of two perspectives – one seeing an enormous resource with almost unlimited potential (African Union Commission, 2006), the other a ticking time bomb if the continent fails to build the structures and economic resilience to support and engage this burgeoning population (African Development Bank, 2018). Seeing youth as Africa's defining opportunity and challenge, governments across the continent have targeted programs and policies from both angles.

In Ghana, where 57% of the population is less than 25 years old (Index Mundi, 2019), unemployment and exclusion from democratic processes and decision-making are blamed for leaving youth vulnerable to manipulation by political parties, which engage some of them in political violence (Dumenu & Adzraku, 2020; Paolo, 2017). Over the years, successive governments have tried to put in place measures to address these challenges.

In 2006, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government under then-President John A. Kufuor introduced the National Youth Employment Policy, but it lacked both legal backing and bipartisan support (Youth Employment Agency, 2018). In 2010, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government's National Youth Policy targeted inadequate education and job training, unemployment and underemployment, growing youth involvement in violent conflicts, and increasing juvenile crime. The vision of the National Youth Policy was to mould "an empowered youth contributing positively to national development" (Government of Ghana, 2010). But the NDC government's Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Agency (GYEEDA) was embroiled in a corruption scandal, and its national coordinator was incarcerated when the NPP returned to power in 2016 (Graphic, 2018) and established the Youth Employment Agency (2018).

After 14 years of interventions by successive governments, challenges and unfulfilled opportunities persist for Ghanaian youth. The Afrobarometer Round 8 survey, conducted in late 2019, reveals that unemployment and education are the most important problems that young Ghanaians want the government to address. Job creation and education are also citizens' top priorities for additional government investment in youth development, and citizens are willing to pay more taxes to support programs to help young people. However, a majority of Ghanaians – and even of youth – think it's more important to listen to the wisdom of the elders than to the fresh ideas of the young.

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. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2020 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between 16 September and 3 October 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

- Unemployment and education are the most important problems that Ghanaian youth (aged 18-35 years) want the government to address. Young adults are 14 and 5 percentage points, respectively, more likely than seniors to cite unemployment and education as their top priorities.
- Six in 10 Ghanaians (60%) would “somewhat support” or “strongly support” higher taxes to fund programs to help the youth.
- Six in 10 respondents (59%) say job creation would be the highest priority if the government could increase its spending to help the youth.
- A majority of Ghanaians believe that in order for the country to do well, we should listen to the wisdom of our elders (54%) rather than to fresh ideas from young people (36%). This view is shared widely across key socio-demographic groups – even among young adults (54%).
- Although the youth are no less interested in politics than their elders and are about equally likely to have participated in 2016 electoral activities, they are less likely than older citizens to contact their leaders, attend community meetings, and get together to raise issues.

Policy priorities for the youth

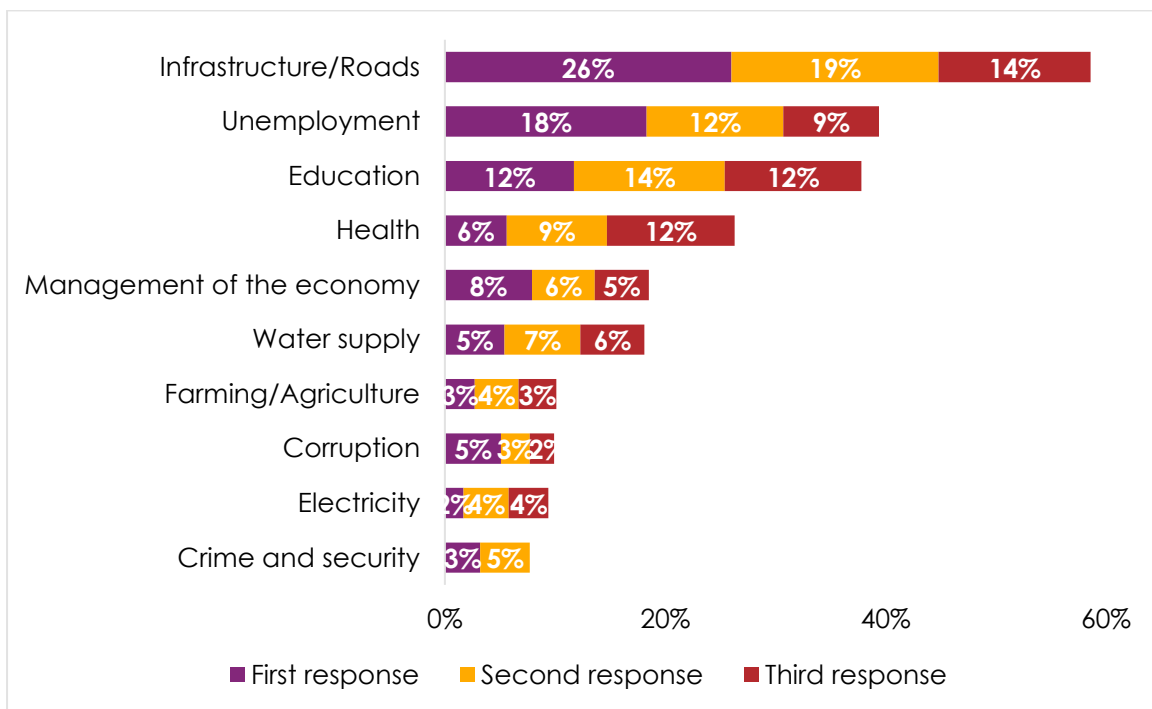
When Afrobarometer asked adults of all ages to cite the most important problems they want the government to address, infrastructure/roads was the most frequently cited priority (mentioned by 59% of respondents), followed by unemployment (39%) and education (38%) (Figure 1). But the youth (aged 18-35) prioritize unemployment (44%) and education (38%)

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more highly than infrastructure/roads (30%) (Figure 2). Young adults are 14 percentage points more likely than seniors (aged 56 and above) to cite unemployment among their top three priorities, and 5 percentage more likely to cite education. In surveys over the past decade, unemployment has consistently ranked No. 1 among the priorities of youth, with education consistently in second or third position.

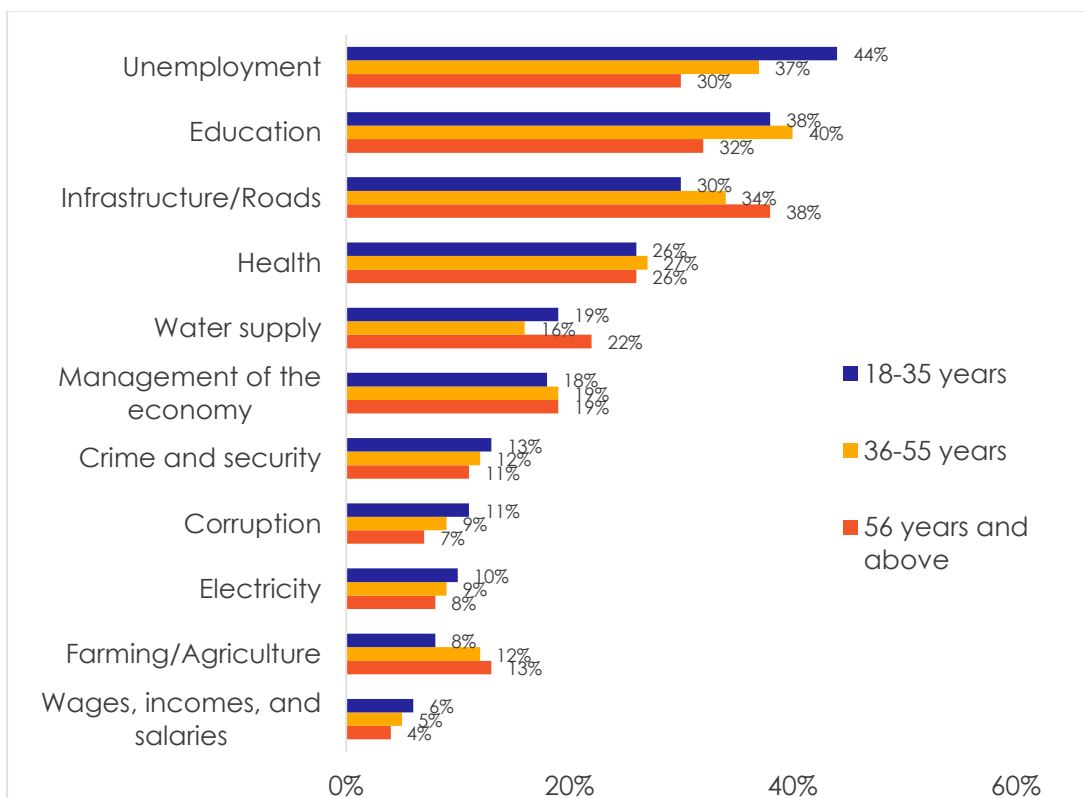
Finding work and escaping poverty are also the most common reasons why Ghanaians consider migrating, a possibility entertained most frequently by young and highly educated citizens (Sanny, Logan, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2019).

Figure 1: Most important problems | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three answers.)

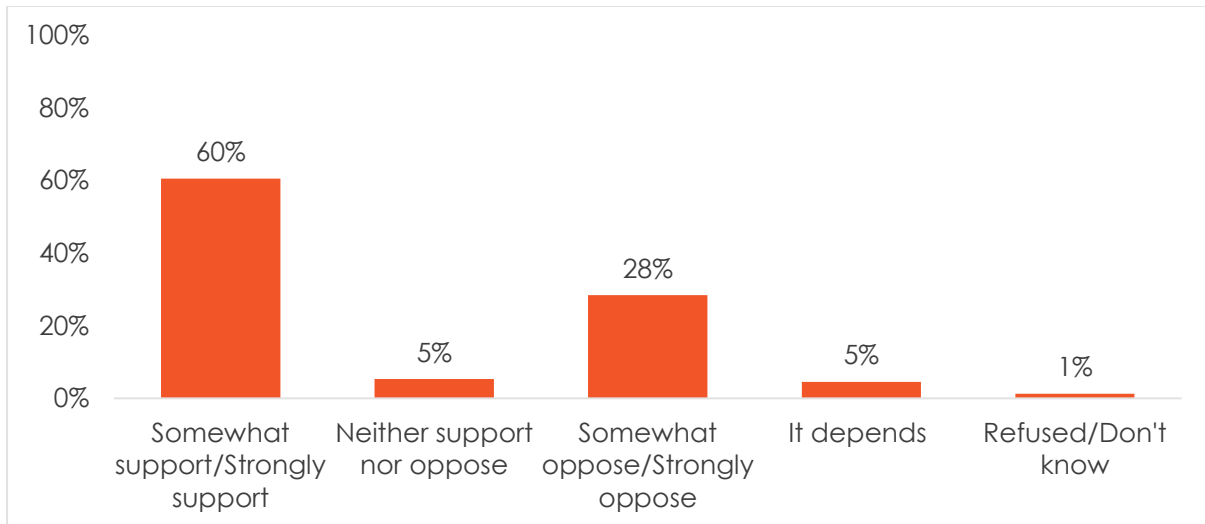
Figure 2: Most important problems | by age group | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three answers.)

Though not listed among important “problems,” youth development is a priority for Ghanaians, as reflected in their willingness to pay higher taxes to fund appropriate programs. Six in 10 respondents (60%) say that if the government decided to make people pay more taxes in order to support programs to help young people, they would “somewhat support” or “strongly support” the decision (Figure 3). Not quite three in 10 (28%) say they would “somewhat” or “strongly” oppose such a move.

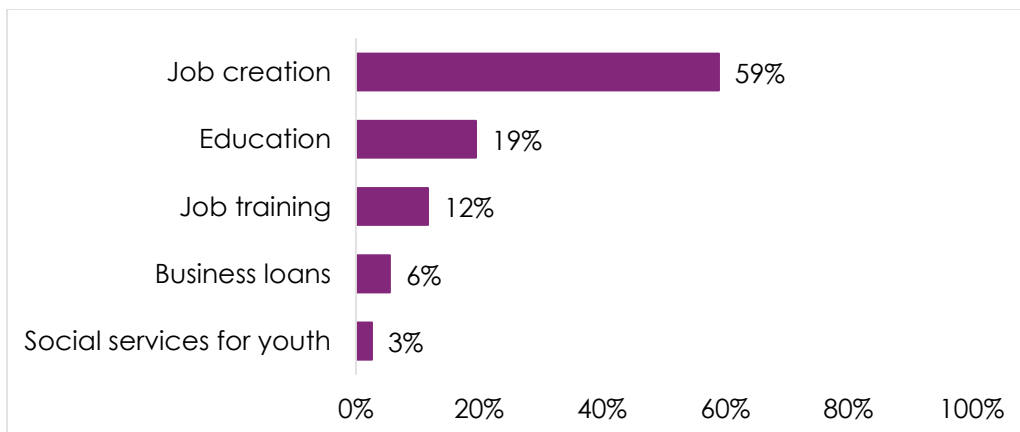
Figure 3: Paying more taxes to support programs to help young people | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: *If the government decided to make people pay more taxes in order to support programs to help young people, would you support this decision or oppose it?*

Consistent with the most important problems cited by young respondents, Ghanaians' top priority, if the government could increase its spending for youth development, would be job creation and education. Six in 10 Ghanaians (59%) say job creation should be the highest priority for additional government investment to help young people, while two in 10 (19%) would focus on education. Job training (12%), business loans (6%), and social services for youth (3%) draw less support (Figure 4).

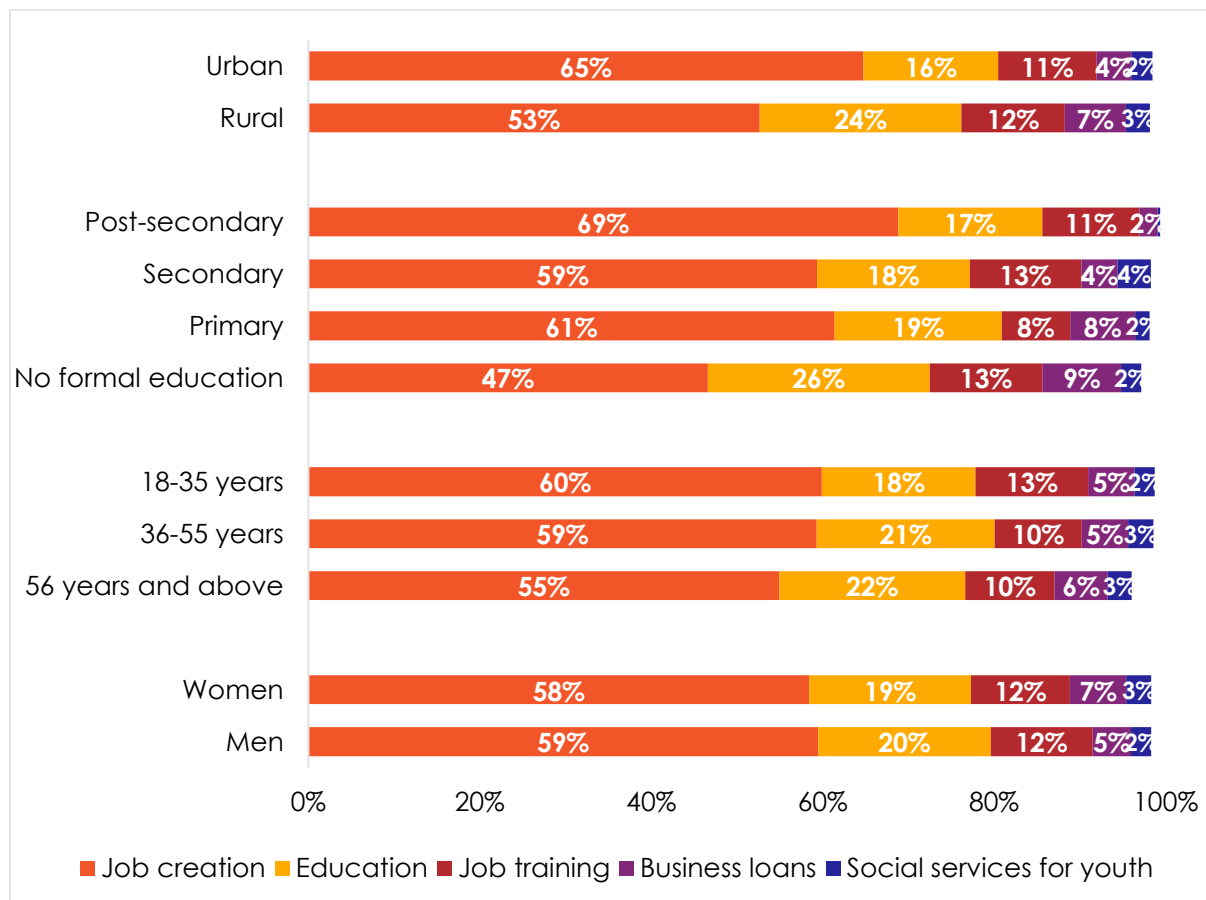
Figure 4: Highest priority for additional investment to help youth | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: *If the government could increase its spending on programs to help young people, which of the following areas do you think should be the highest priority for additional investment?*

Although citizens' ranking of priorities for additional investment to help youth is consistent across key socio-demographic groups, urban residents are more likely than their rural counterparts to cite job creation (65% vs. 53%) and less likely to prioritize education (16% vs. 24%) (Figure 5). Likewise, educated citizens are more likely to prioritize job creation (69% among those with post-secondary education vs. 47% among those with no formal education), and less likely to prioritize investment in education (17% vs. 26%). The priorities of young respondents differ very little from those of their elders.

Figure 5: Highest priority for additional investment to help youth | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019

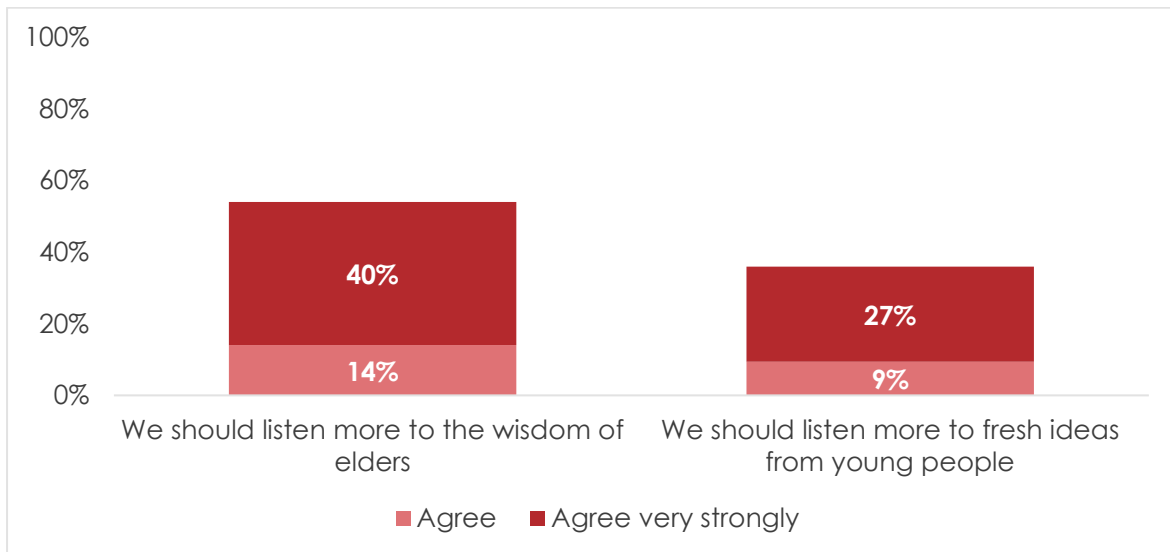


Respondents were asked: *If the government could increase its spending on programs to help young people, which of the following areas do you think should be the highest priority for additional investment?*

Should we listen more to the youth?

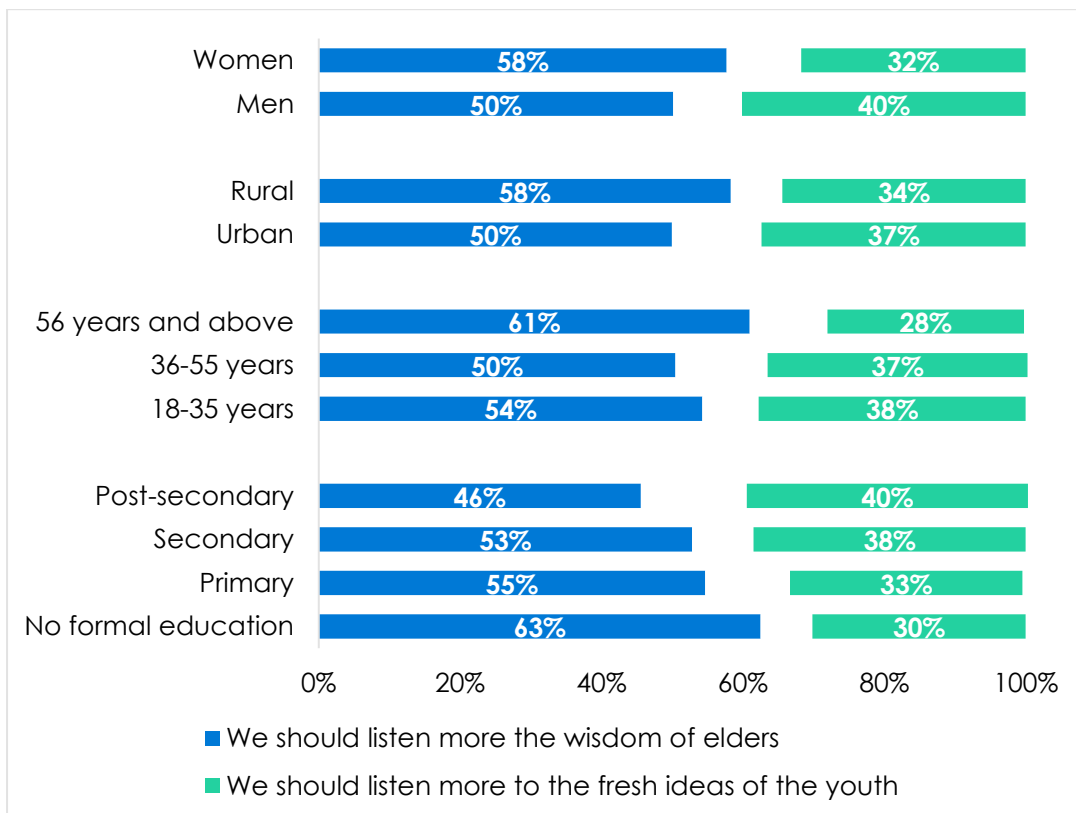
For those concerned about youth disengagement from civic and political processes, one frequently suggested remedy is to ensure that youth have a voice (Gamson, 2020; Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2020). However, only about one-third (36%) of Ghanaians agree with the idea that "in order for our country to do well, we should listen more to fresh ideas from young people." Instead, a majority (54%) say that "we should listen more to the wisdom of our elders," including 40% who "agree very strongly" with this view (Figure 6). The need to pay more attention to the youth is a minority view across key socio-demographic groups – even among youth themselves (38%). Men (40%) and respondents with post-secondary education (40%) are somewhat more likely to emphasize listening to youth than are women (32%) and citizens without formal education (30%) (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Should we listen more to the youth or to elders? | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: In order for our country to do well, we should listen more to the wisdom of our elders.
 Statement 2: In order for our country to do well, we should listen more to fresh ideas from young people.

Figure 7: Should we listen more to the youth or to elders? | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: In order for our country to do well, we should listen more to the wisdom of our elders.
 Statement 2: In order for our country to do well, we should listen more to fresh ideas from young people.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

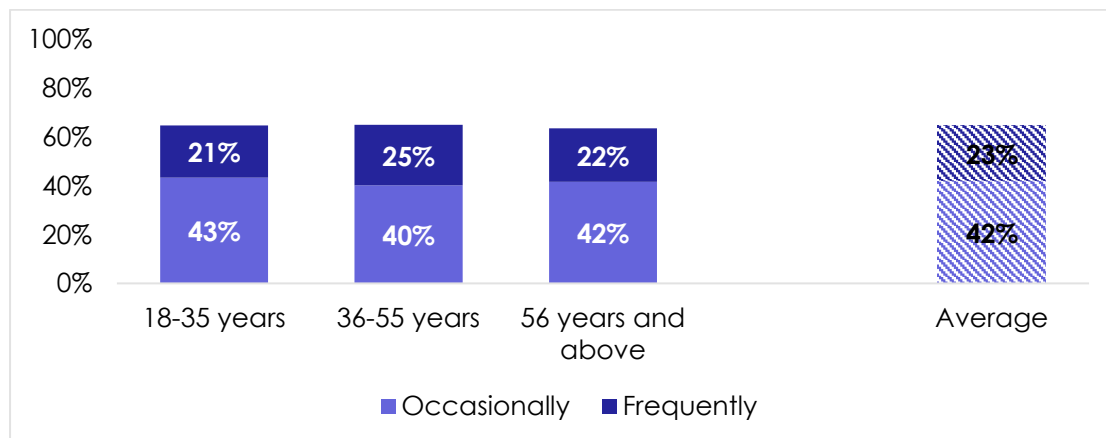
Political and civic engagement by the youth

For activists focused on political and civic engagement as one possible avenue for helping youth, the Afrobarometer survey offers mixed findings. Almost two-thirds (64%) of youth say they “occasionally” or “frequently” discuss political matters with friends and family – about the same proportion as among older age cohorts (Figure 8).

And in terms of political participation, youth are about as likely as their elders to have been engaged in 2016 electoral activities such as attending a campaign rally (31% among those aged 18-35), working for a candidate or party (17%), and being contacted by a political party (22%) (Figure 9).

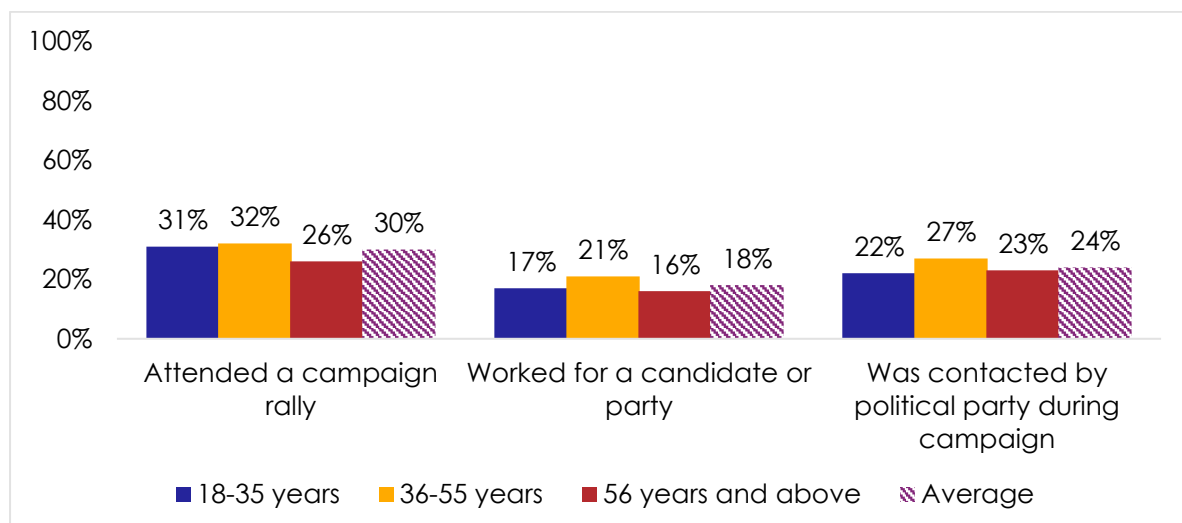
However, they are less likely than older citizens to have attended a community meeting (43%), gotten together with others to raise an issue (39%), and contacted leaders during the previous 12 months (Figure 10).

Figure 8: How often discuss politics | by age group | Ghana | 2019



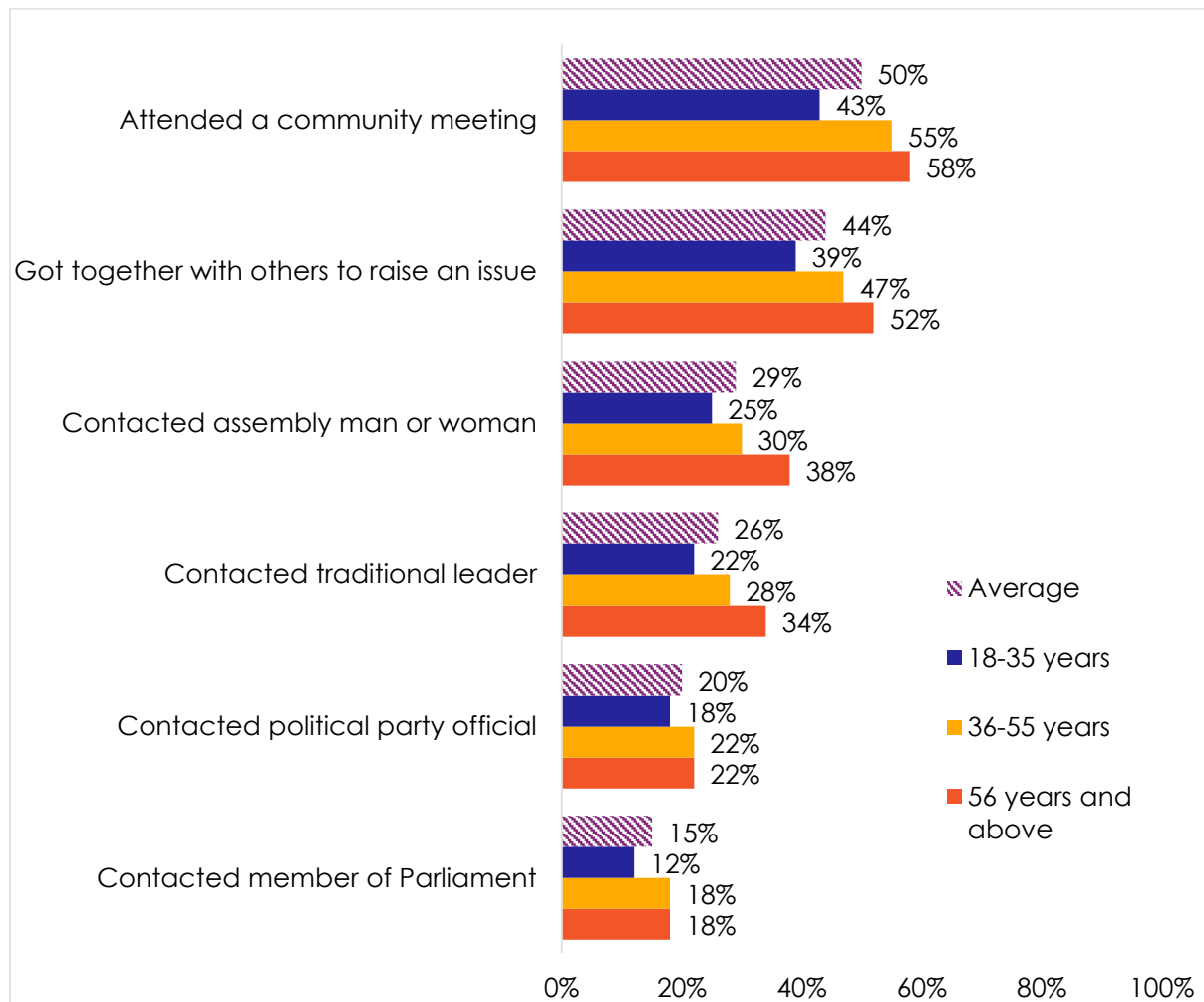
Respondents were asked: When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters: Frequently? Occasionally? Never?

Figure 9: Political participation | by age group | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: Thinking about the last national election in 2016, did you attend a campaign rally? Did you work for a candidate or party? Did any representative of a political party contact you during the campaign? (% who say “yes”)

Figure 10: Civic engagement | by age group | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked:

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. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

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 took these actions at least once)

Conclusion

Afrobarometer findings show that in the eyes of young Ghanaians, unemployment continues to be, as it has for years, the most important problem that the government must address. Job creation is first on Ghanaians' list of priorities for additional spending to help young people, and citizens are willing to pay more taxes to fund programs for youth development. But a majority of Ghanaians – even of young adults – want the country to listen more to the wisdom of the elders than to fresh ideas of the youth. While activists and civil society advocate for youth inclusion in policy decision-making processes, they may also have to educate the youth about the importance of making their voices heard.

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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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