

AFRO BAROMETER

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YOUNG AND OLD IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: WHO ARE THE REAL DEMOCRATS

by Annie Chikwanha and Eldred Masunungure

**A comparative series of national public
attitude surveys on democracy, markets
and civil society in Africa.**



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Young and Old in Sub-Saharan Africa: Who are the Real Democrats?

Abstract

The assumption of modernization theory has always been that the young would be among those at the forefront of movements for political liberalization. To what extent does this assumption hold true? Do the youth in Africa have a better understanding of – and are they more committed to – democracy than their more mature counterparts? Will the youth occupy the frontlines in defence of democracy, while the elderly acquiesce more willingly to the authoritarian impulses of leaders? This paper explores differences among these groups with respect to political attitudes and behaviours, evaluations of government performance, political participation and other factors that help us understand the orientation of diverse individuals toward their political systems. We devote special attention to the attitudes of African youth, and what they tell us about the vision younger Africans have of their political future, and their understanding of what “citizenship” means. The analysis reveals that differences between the two generations on political attitudes to democracy are minimal as both groups exhibit high levels of support for democracy. But major differences in political behaviour are particularly evident in voting and other forms of political participation, as well as in trust in key political institutions, where youth consistently lag behind their elders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Few studies have attempted to use a comparative approach in analysing the role of the youths in African politics. This paper endeavours to fill this gap by comparing the political attitudes of the youth with their elderly counterparts across 18 African countries. Some of the major findings reveal that:

- There are more inter-generational similarities in political attitudes about democracy than there are differences.
- The absence of a wide generational gap between the youth and their elders across the Afrobarometer countries confirms that there is an “anti-authoritarian” consensus; neither the young nor their elders express a preference for a non-democratic order.
- But the youth are less satisfied with their countries’ democracy than their elders and even more pessimistic about the democratic future of their regimes.
- The youth are more optimistic about economic affairs but more pessimistic in political affairs than their older folk.
- Inter-generational assessments tend to converge with regard to evaluations of the country’s current economic circumstances and yet evaluations of individual living conditions differ significantly between the youth and the old.
- Both age groups agree that government performance in service delivery, especially in economic management, is lacklustre.
- Youths are clearly more critical of their elected political leaders than the elders. They disapprove more of the political leadership’s performance.
- A worrying revelation is that African youths are *less trustful* of their public institutions. They portray an unhealthy lack of confidence in key institutions.
- Generally, both the youth and their seniors see more corruption among policy administrators (especially civil servants) than policy makers (politicians like the president, members of parliament and local councillors).
- The youth are shy to participate in politics and, throughout the Afrobarometer group of countries, they display lower levels of participation than their elders. However, even if youngsters have a greater propensity to protest, there is no generation gap with regard to actual participation in street demonstrations.
- There is a widespread feeling of political inefficacy across the generations with up to seven in ten in each category expressing a sense of subjective political incompetence. Both generations find politics and government rather too complicated to understand.
- Though there is a wide educational gap between the two generations, both groups exhibit similar levels of political discussion.
- The generation gap in party affiliation is substantial. The elders are more partisan than their juniors.

INTRODUCTION

Youth and Their Elders in African Politics

Our findings in this paper confirm the reality in most African societies that age is a significant factor defining social and political relationships. To draw attention to the significance of age for understanding human behaviour and politics, the World Bank devoted its 2007 *World Development Report* to the youth - “the next generation”. One of the highlights of this report is that 1.3 billion young people, the largest-ever youth group in history, now live in the developing world. Because the future of new democracies is in their hands, there is therefore a compelling need to devote attention to this age group. Using public opinion data collected in 2005-6 from 18 African countries, this paper does that by comparing this age group with their elders.

In a way, this paper is a response to a research question posed by Bratton et al. (2005:165) in their seminal work entitled *Public Opinion, Democracy and Market Reform in Africa*: “Do young Africans differ in their attitudes and behaviours from those who are middle aged or older?” Is there a connection between age and political values, attitudes and behaviours among adult Africans? The cohort aged 18 to 30 years old must in all likelihood have come to political adulthood in the post-despotic period of African political development. This makes us ponder: Does age shape the way Africans think and behave? Are the youthful adults of post-authoritarian sub-Saharan Africa agents of change and more open to new forms of politics? Does age discriminate between supporters and opponents of democracy; or does it matter regarding political trust and political participation? Do older adults harbour any nostalgia for previous one-party political systems that luckily eluded the younger generation? And again we ask, are the youth: “the vanguards or the laggards of political and economic liberalisation?”

The findings reveal that, although there is congruence on political regime preferences between the young and the old (with both groups opting for democracy), there are yawning gaps in perceptions across the range of issues explored in this paper: economic evaluations, policy performance, institutional trust, corruption and political participation. Differences in political behaviour between the two age groups are especially sharply pronounced in voting and participation, with elders being more active than the youth.

Defining Youth

There is a general definitional problem of “youth”. One study, perhaps in exasperation, unhelpfully observes that the “youth can be defined in a number of ways depending on one’s objective.” (get reference) The term youth is multifaceted. Indeed, for the Anglican Church, one is a youth until marriage! Many analysts have thus settled for what they call an “all-encompassing definition of a youth” which is “anyone who is not older than thirty years of age” (ibid: 7) and this paper uses this chronological definition.

Age is usually treated as a demographic variable that helps define the topography of the social structure. But, throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa, one should not lose sight of the fact that age is also an important cultural variable and is often, along with gender, the basis for the hierarchical organisation of families and communities. From the cradle to the grave, most indigenous African cultures invest a lot of meaning in age. The older a person is, the more respect and reverence one attracts and the more one is listened to. The reverse is equally true. Most indigenous societies in Africa are gerontocratic with traditional leaders and their counsellors often in advanced stages of their life cycles. Age is thus undoubtedly a paradigm for the construction of governance rules and social expectations. African societies and cultures invest considerable importance in elders in the form of status and social recognition. The ethic and norm of deference of youth to elders is deeply rooted. In fact, it can be said that in African societies, gerontocracy is to youth what patriarchy is to women.

Does the culturally ingrained ethic of respect for elders have a bearing on democratic politics, one central value of which is equality in the conduct of public affairs? Moreover, does respect for elders translate into tolerance for gerontocratic regimes such as the Mugabe autocracy in Zimbabwe? Does the traditional norm of not questioning or challenging elders act as a brake on a democratic politics that is anchored in free expression of political dissent? Does “political culture” have an explanatory power in explaining the political generation gap in Africa or could it be that Bratton et al. (2005:39) are right in suspecting that “cultural values will be fairly incoherent, having less influence on public opinion in African countries than theories of political culture would have us believe”?

In an attempt to answer the questions posed above, this paper is divided into seven sections. Section one introduces the debate on the youth *vis-a-vis* their elders in African politics. Brief methodological explanations and technical notes that are essential in interpreting the data are also presented in this section. A quick discussion of the samples used in this paper winds off this introductory section.

In section two, we look at generational differences in preferences towards political regimes. High preference and persistent support for democracy amongst the youth would indicate likely future political stability. This, coupled with high levels of rejection of authoritarian rule, would also send signals that the youth are more likely to guard against the erosion of democracy and can be counted on to stand up in democracy’s defence.

The third section delves into popular assessments of the macro and micro economy in two time periods, the present and the future. The relationships between these variables and the endurance of democracy are discussed. The fourth section focuses on performance evaluations in key policy sectors. Section five analyses generational differences on the levels of political legitimacy enjoyed by African regimes.

In the sixth section, we compare political behaviour between the two age groups. Worldwide trends indicate that electoral participation amongst the youth is on the decline. Yet political violence associated with elections in particular is always blamed on them. How wide are these differences and what explains any gap?

The seventh section attempts to explain the factors that account for political participation and political legitimacy. Selected factors – not only age, but also habitat (rural/urban), gender, cognition, performance evaluation and contentment with democracy – are used to explain participation and legitimacy. The last section presents the conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The evidence used in this paper comes from Afrobarometer¹ Round 3 survey data. The surveys were conducted across eighteen sub-Saharan African countries during 2005-6². Face to face interviews with adults over the age of 18 were conducted in all the countries. The nationally representative samples covered the adult population (i.e., those over 18 years old and eligible to vote) in each country. Survey respondents were selected using a multistage, stratified, clustered area design that was randomized at every stage with probability proportional to population size³. The total sample size for the 18 countries

¹ The Afrobarometer Project conducts national public attitude surveys on democracy, markets and civil society in selected African countries. The project is a joint enterprise of Michigan State University, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa and the Centre for Democracy and Development in Ghana.

² This paper does not focus on an analysis of overall country standing. For this, refer to Afrobarometer Working Papers no 60 and 61, www.afrobarometer.org

³ Generally, country samples are self-weighting. In some countries, however, statistical weights were used to adjust for purposive over-sampling of minorities or to correct for inadvertent deviations from the planned sample during

was 25,397 (See Appendix A) and the minimum sample size in any country was 1200, which is sufficient to yield a confidence interval of plus or minus 2.8 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent⁴. In three countries with sample sizes of approximately 2400 – Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda – the margin of sampling error decreases to plus or minus 2 percent.

The questionnaire was produced initially in English, and then translated into other national languages (French, Portuguese, and Swahili). The questionnaire was then “indigenized” in each country to reflect country-specific factors, after which it was translated into the primary local languages. Respondents were then interviewed by trained interviewers in the language of the respondent’s choice.

The Afrobarometer countries are: in West Africa - Ghana, Senegal, Benin, Cape Verde, Nigeria and Mali; from central Africa - Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya; and in Southern Africa - Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and Malawi and Madagascar. This grouping by region does not imply anything about the representativeness of the chosen to the sub-Saharan subcontinent as a whole. Having undergone a measure of political and economic reform, the surveyed countries are among the continent’s most open regimes. However, the inclusion of countries with serious internal conflicts – like Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe – helps to make the country sample somewhat more representative of the sub-continent. But considerable caution is nonetheless warranted when projecting Afrobarometer results to all “Africans.”

Percentages reported in the tables reflect valid responses. Unless otherwise noted, “don’t know” responses are included, even if they are not shown⁵. But missing data, refusals to answer, and cases where a question was not applicable are excluded from the calculations. Except where noted, the share of missing data is small and does not significantly change the sample size or confidence interval. All percentages have been rounded to whole numbers. This occasionally introduces small anomalies in which the sum of total reported responses does not equal 100 percent. An empty cell signifies that a particular question was not asked in a given country. In many cases, we have combined response categories. For example, “satisfied” and “very satisfied” responses are added together and reported as a single figure. Rounding was applied only after response categories were aggregated.

In our samples, the category we define as the male youth is consistently smaller than the adult male population as determined by national censuses. There are also some gender differences as young males tend to be fewer than female respondents (see Table 1). On area of habitation, more young people than the elderly are found in urban areas. And at least a quarter of the youth report being heads of households. This result contradicts Western conceptions that the youth tend to postpone the assumption of responsibilities that are associated with adulthood (Soule 2006). African youth are not necessarily free of such responsibilities; instead they and others attach importance to an individual settling into one’s community. This cultural value concurs with Wohl’s (1979:203) assertion that “the truest community to which one can belong is that defined by age and experience”. In fact, responses by the youth to a question that requires them to choose between two statements referring to who should shoulder the responsibility for one’s welfare indicate that they are more likely to favour taking responsibility for their

fieldwork. The frequency distributions reported in the tables reflect these within-country weights. The exception is Zimbabwe, where the sample was not weighted to account for the under-sampling due to early termination of fieldwork.

⁴ The sample size in Zimbabwe was 1048 due to fieldwork disruptions.

⁵ All don’t knows and missing data were only removed before computing correlations and regression coefficients.

own welfare (see Table 2)⁶. At the country level, young people claim to be especially self-reliant in Namibia and Zambia (7 percent), Cape Verde (12 percent) and Botswana (14 percent).

The two different age groups have been exposed to significantly different amounts of education: twice as many youths report having completed high school (see Table 1.) A major cause for concern is the large proportion of young Africans who are not employed but are actively looking for jobs (39 percent, versus 24 percent for elders - not shown in table). This result is supported by the *World Development Report* (2007:7), which observed that unemployment rates amongst the youths are systematically higher than for older generations across all societies.

Youth unemployment is also corroborated by the report on *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (2004), which noted that, while youths constitute 25 percent of the working age population between 15 and 64, they make up as much as 47 percent of the total 18 600 000 people who are out of work worldwide. The implication is that addressing youth unemployment and its attendant problems such as social exclusion would contribute significantly to economic growth and political stability. Being unemployed leads to restlessness and this perhaps makes the youth more likely to resort to illegal activities.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Gender	Youth	Elderly
Male	46	53
Female	54	47
Location		
Rural	61	68
Urban	39	32
Head of household		
No	74	31
Yes	26	69
Education		
No formal/informal schooling	13	27
Informal schooling only		
Some primary/completed primary	32	41
Secondary school completed/high school	45	23
Post-secondary qualifications, including university	10	8
Employment status		
Unemployed	69	62
Employed part time	13	13
Employed full time	17	25

⁶ Most tables present a “generation gap” measured as the percentage among youth minus the percentage among elders. A positive sign indicates that youth are more likely to express a given opinion or take a certain action and a negative sign indicates the opposite.

Table 2: Willingness To Shoulder Responsibility For Well Being

	A. People should look after themselves			B. Govt should be responsible for people		
	Youth	Elderly	Difference	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Benin	37	36	1	61	60	0
Botswana	58	43	14	36	48	-12
Cape Verde	56	45	12	37	48	-11
Ghana	58	55	3	39	43	-4
Kenya	44	45	0	53	51	2
Lesotho	44	40	4	53	56	-3
Madagascar	49	52	-3	47	42	5
Malawi	52	47	5	46	51	-5
Mali	58	58	0	40	40	0
Mozambique	44	43	2	53	55	-2
Namibia	47	40	7	51	58	-7
Nigeria	43	40	3	55	58	-3
Senegal	51	49	3	41	43	-2
South Africa	57	53	4	42	44	-2
Tanzania	66	67	-1	32	30	2
Uganda	31	31	0	67	66	0
Zambia	51	43	7	48	55	-7
Mean	47	44	4	45	47	-3

Lets talk for a moment about the kind of society we would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B. Statement A. People should look after themselves and be responsible for their own success in life. Statement B. The government should bear the main responsibility for the well-being of people.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND EDUCATION

Throughout three rounds of surveys (1999-2006), the Afrobarometer has regularly asked questions about the employment status of the respondents.. It is evident that unemployment is a serious problem across all age groups. However, the youth (defined here as those 30 years old and under) are much more susceptible to being unemployed than their elders. Pooled data from all 18 countries surveyed in 2005-6 shows that up to seven in ten (69 percent)of youth are unemployed compared to six in ten (62 percent) of the over-30 age group. Further, while 28 percent of the elders said they were employed on a full time basis, only about 18 percent enjoyed this status among the youth.

Yet the elders as a group are less endowed with education than the younger generation. Table 1 shows that over a quarter of the elderly did not receive any formal education (27 percent), 41 percent of them obtained primary education, just below a quarter received secondary education (23 percent), and only 8 percent boast of post-secondary education. There is a yawning generational gap with regard to educational attainments. The gap in educational achievement is most visible at secondary school level where 23 percent of the elders possess secondary education compared 45 percent of the youth. The youth are therefore much more educated than their mothers and fathers.

The co-existence of high unemployment and high educational attainments among the youth is an incendiary potential threat to social and political stability. Up to 55 percent of all the youth have either secondary or post-secondary education. An educated but unemployed youth creates a very serious problem for those in power because of the high expectations of this group. Unemployment does create social situations and experiences that have wider consequences than individual discomfort (Fauske 1996).

POLITICAL REGIME PREFERENCES

The first substantive area we investigate is the role of age in shaping political regime preferences. Is there an “age effect” on political attitudes towards democracy? Because young people came of age politically after 1990, when democratic transitions were underway in Africa, are they more attached to democracy than their elders? Or, because they are too young to have experienced military or *de jure* one party rule at first hand, are they more forgiving of the excesses of authoritarian rulers?

In their analysis of the Afrobarometer data (Round 1, 1999-2000), Bratton and colleagues found that “age alone has little impact on attitudes to economic and political reform” (2005:165). Is this finding validated by subsequent survey evidence? In Table 2 below, we present evidence from Round 3 (2005-6) to test this assertion.

Table 3: Preference For Democracy

	Young	Elderly	Difference
Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.	62	63	-1
In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable	10	9	+1
For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have	12	12	0
Don't know	15	16	-1

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Both younger and older Africans display considerable support for a democratic regime. The question then is whether both generations are equally supportive. Or could it be that the latter are somehow nostalgic about ‘old Africa’ that is, pre-democratic Africa? A final possibility is that Africans are indifferent or ambivalent about the character of the regime they want to live under. As is shown above (Table 3), six in ten adult Africans say they prefer democracy to any other form of rule. Importantly, there is no significant difference in orientations between the age groups under review. Sixty two percent of young Africans and 63 percent of their elders express preference for a democratic dispensation. Furthermore, there is no generation gap in preferences for non-democratic systems; only 10 percent of the young and 9 percent of the older Africans would tolerate an authoritarian regime “in some circumstances.”

However, a reason for concern is the high proportions of both young and old adult Africans who are either indifferent to democracy or not knowledgeable about their preferences. More than a quarter, 27 percent of the young and 28 percent of the old, fall into this category.

Even at the country level (Table 4), there are only a few cases of significant generational variations. Two countries are extreme outliers: in Cape Verde young people express more support for democracy than their elders, but in Tanzania, they express less. It is not clear, especially in the latter case, why this should be the case. We can hazard a guess that this appears to be related to the low level of understanding of what “democracy” means among Tanzanian youth (31 percent), even when this concept was translated into a local language.

Table 4: Preference For Democracy By Country

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Benin	69	71	-2
Botswana	69	69	0
Cape Verde	76	65	11
Ghana	73	76	-3
Kenya	73	76	-4
Lesotho	51	50	2
Madagascar	41	44	-3
Malawi	56	56	0
Mali	64	69	-5
Mozambique	57	56	1
Namibia	58	55	3
Nigeria	64	67	-2
Senegal	76	75	2
South Africa	65	64	1
Tanzania	27	44	-17
Uganda	59	64	-5
Zambia	65	64	1
Zimbabwe	70	64	6
Mean	51	51	5

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? Percentage reporting saying “Democracy is always best”

Nor is there a generation gap in rejection of non-democratic rule. Table 5 shows that all three authoritarian regime types are roundly rejected; ‘big man’ rule more than military rule, and military rule more than one party rule. The one party regime type appears to be still having a residual though diminishing appeal when compared to the 66 percent who rejected this regime type in an earlier survey. Most importantly for our purposes here, however, both political generations *equally* reject authoritarian types, and with *equal* intensity. In other words, and in a hopeful sign for democracy’s future in Africa, even though young people have not personally experienced previous forms of authoritarian rule, they are still not strongly attracted to them.

Table 5: Rejection Of Authoritarian Rule

	Young	Elderly	Difference
Military rule	73	72	1
One party rule	71	71	0
One man rule	77	76	1

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternative: the army comes in to govern the country? Percent “disapprove/strongly disapprove”

It may be noted with some gratification that, for both young and old Africans, the level of rejection of authoritarianism is higher than support for democracy, signifying that even if democracy has its defects, its authoritarian alternatives are clearly unacceptable options. Therefore, recidivism into authoritarianism is rather unlikely or, if it does make a comeback, a democratic breakdown is unlikely to meet with the citizens’ endorsement.

Age-based distinctions emerge at the country level (see Table 6) but only in a few countries. Again, the youth in Cape Verde hold distinctively strong anti-authoritarian views (a +12 percent generation gap, for one man and military rule, and +7 percent gap for one party rule). But in Namibia, only a minority of the

population would regard a military takeover in a negative light and resistance to this form of rule is especially weak among older people (a +7 percent generation gap for military rule).

Table 6: Rejection Of Authoritarian Rule, By Age And Country

Country	Rejection of One Party Rule			Rejection of Military Rule			Rejection of One Man Rule		
	Youth	Elderly	Difference	Youth	Elderly	Difference	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Benin	83	83	0	67	66	1	80	81	-1
Botswana	81	82	-1	79	80	0	88	89	-1
Cape Verde	82	75	8	78	66	12	72	60	13
Ghana	83	81	1	83	82	1	86	84	2
Kenya	70	76	-6	89	90	-1	89	88	1
Lesotho	71	70	0	76	87	-10	85	87	-2
Madagascar	71	71	0	66	60	5	73	75	-1
Malawi	56	56	0	50	51	-1	65	66	-1
Mali	72	73	-2	68	66	2	72	74	-2
Mozambique	52	51	2	62	53	9	43	41	2
Namibia	61	57	4	43	37	7	47	43	4
Nigeria	82	82	0	72	72	0	74	76	-2
Senegal	78	76	2	81	80	0	86	86	0
South Africa	67	65	2	73	72	1	64	64	0
Tanzania	44	43	1	81	82	-2	80	82	-2
Uganda	55	58	-3	73	80	-7	90	91	-1
Zambia	85	87	-1	93	91	2	88	91	-3
Zimbabwe	89	88	1	86	82	4	92	89	4
Mean	57	57	4	58	57	5	61	60	5

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternative: the army comes in to govern the country? Percent saying “disapprove/strongly disapprove”

Overall, across the Afrobarometer countries, and notwithstanding some lingering reservations in the countries cited above, there is a popular consensus against authoritarian rule. Moreover, there are more inter-generational similarities in political attitudes about democracy than there are differences. A political generational gap is not apparent since neither the young nor their elders express a preference for a non-democratic order. As to whether democracy in Africa is wide but still shallow, as Bratton (2002) asserts, and if so, whether any such ‘shallowness’ is most evident among youth or their elders, is still to be established.

How Much Democracy?

Table 7: Extent Of Democracy

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
This country is not a democracy	7	6	-2
A demo with major problems	26	23	3
Full democracy/democracy with minor problems	49	51	-3
Do not understand democracy	10	11	-1
Don't know	8	9	-1

In your opinion, how much of a democracy is (your country) today?

There is generally a convergence of public opinion on the extent of democracy across the 18 countries surveyed. About three in five Africans evaluate their countries as either a “full democracy” or “a democracy with minor problems.” Elders (51 percent) are however slightly more likely to pass this verdict than the youthful generation (49 percent), a difference that is statistically significant but falls within the margin of survey sampling error (See Table 7).

Satisfaction With Democracy

Our second measure of regime performance is satisfaction with democracy, an empirical evaluation of the actual operations of the regime in practice. Do the youth and the old differ on this score? The evidence presented in Table 8 below indicates that the youthful generation is less inclined to be satisfied. In fact, just 42 percent of the youth reported being satisfied compared to 48 percent of their elders, a difference that is not only statistically significant but also is very unlikely to be due to sampling error.

Table 8: Satisfaction With Democracy By Age

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Not a democracy	2	2	0
Not at all/not very satisfied	40	33	7
Fairly satisfied/very satisfied	42	48	-6
Don't know	16	17	-1

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in (your country)?

We speculate that the elders have a personal history of experience with authoritarian rule against which to judge the performance of the present regime. The youth may only hear or read about authoritarianism and therefore have no experiential benchmark for evaluating the present regime against the past. They may, under these circumstances, be forced to use other known democracies or some imagined ideal situation in order to make a judgement. The elders have a firmer empirical basis to say “not good enough, but better than the past”, while for the youth, the present is not that good enough against an imagined or idealised situation. This is consistent with the speculation by Bratton et al (2005) that the assessment of democracy depends a lot “on the yardstick that individuals use to judge the accomplishments of the new order” and therefore that:

If measured against recollections of the previous regime’s record, democracy may appear as the lesser of two evils. But if counter-posed against dreams of a perfect future, democracy is destined to always fall short (ibid:81).

Nor do the youth see a brighter future for democracy in their countries than their elders. Evidence in Table 9 does not lend support to this proposition. By a margin of 5 percentage points, the youth are less hopeful that their countries will remain democratic. A breakdown by country suggests that this cross-national difference is driven largely by Tanzania. In this country especially, the youth see democracy

being imperiled in the future and the rural youth are likely to think this way more than their urban counterparts.

Table 9: Future Of Democracy By Age

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
This country is not a democracy	1	1	0
Not at all/not very likely	25	20	5
Likely/very likely	53	55	-5
Don't know	21	23	-1

How likely is it that (country) will remain a democratic country?

When all is said and done, one finding stands out: *the youth are less satisfied with their country's democracy than their elders*. As already suggested, the youth and their seniors seem to be using different mental templates, the latter using the past to compare with the present and they invariably find the present more favourable while we suspect that the youth tend to use the ideal situation as their yardstick and thus pass a harsher judgement.

ECONOMIC EVALUATIONS

The Afrobarometer surveys have consistently asked respondents to make evaluations of the state of the economy at two levels: the macro-level, that is, assessments of their country's economic conditions; and the micro-level, evaluating their own personal living conditions. In both cases, citizens are asked to make assessments with reference to the present and the future. For both time horizons, inter-generational assessments tend to converge with regard to evaluations of the country's economic circumstances whilst evaluations of personal living conditions differ significantly between the youth and the old.

Notwithstanding the reality of the scourge of unemployment among the youth, this age group actually tends to be more positive – albeit only slightly - about current economic conditions than their elders. For instance, while 27 percent of the older generation described the economic conditions in their respective countries as good, a marginally higher proportion (30 percent) of youth volunteered this response. This statistically significant difference lies just at the cusp of possible sampling error. However, the youth clearly hold more positive views of their present personal living conditions.

Table 10: Present Economic Evaluations

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Country's present economic condition	30	27	3
Own present living conditions	30	23	7
Country's economic condition in 12 months	50	47	3
Own present living conditions in 12 months	54	46	8

Looking ahead, do you expect your economic/living conditions to be better or worse in twelve months time? Percent who reported "fairly good/very good/better/much better"

Projecting into the future, both age groups exude lukewarm optimism, with the youth (50 percent) being slightly more buoyant than their elders (47 percent) on the country's future economic prospects. Regarding the assessment of personal living conditions for the oncoming year, the youth are markedly more optimistic than their elders with up to 54 percent of the young adults expecting their personal economic conditions to improve in the future.

The country variations in future economic expectations are often quite large (See Table 11) ranging from very high expectations in Cape Verde (where, on both issues, over eight in ten in both age groups

expecting the oncoming year to be better) to extremely low in Zimbabwe (where fewer than one in ten expect immediate future improvements).

Table 11: Expectations Gap Between Youth And Elders, By Country

Country	Country's future conditions			Individual future living conditions		
	Youth	Elderly	Difference	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Benin	37	33	4	35	37	-1
Botswana	54	36	18	32	44	-12
Cape Verde	86	81	5	80	85	-5
Ghana	52	40	12	43	48	-5
Kenya	46	44	2	44	48	-3
Lesotho	26	25	2	22	25	-3
Madagascar	58	63	-5	67	66	0
Malawi	36	34	2	33	35	-2
Mali	64	62	1	65	65	0
Mozambique	60	54	7	43	46	-4
Namibia	71	74	-3	60	60	0
Nigeria	59	59	0	68	69	-1
Senegal	61	65	-4	69	69	0
South Africa	67	60	7	55	59	-4
Tanzania	41	34	7	33	36	-3
Uganda	51	46	5	45	51	-6
Zambia	28	23	5	37	40	-4
Zimbabwe	8	8	0	8	9	-1
Mean	50	47	0	46	49	-1

Looking ahead, do you expect your economic/living conditions to be "better or worse" in twelve months time? Percent who reported "better/much better."

On the all-important question of generational differences, we find mixed results. With regard to the future of the macro-economy, young people are more optimistic than their elders. This is especially so in Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania, where recent sustained economic growth appears to have infused young people with distinctively positive "sociotropic" assessments.

Why are the youth in sub-Saharan Africa generally more hopeful about the macro-economic future than their elderly folk who, presumably have 'seen it all' in terms of economic decline and have therefore a better experiential template to make more informed judgments? Are the youths generically more hopeful, that is, are they hopeful 'by nature'? In short, are hopes about the economic future related to age? Table 12 certainly gives the strong impression that people's hopes about their economic future conditions are age-related.

Table 12: Future Economic Prospects

Age groups	18-24	25-30	31-45	46-60	60+
Worse/much worse	19	19	22	23	22
Same	14	16	16	16	16
Better/much better	56	52	48	46	41
Don't know	11	14	14	16	20

Looking ahead, do you expect the following to be better or worse in twelve months time? Economic conditions in this country in twelve months time? Percent who reported "better/much better."

But the generational pattern of youth optimism is reversed with regard to “egocentric” views of personal prospects at the micro-level. Especially in Botswana, but systematically almost everywhere, young people are less hopeful about their *own* economic futures. Even in growing economies, young people seem to lack faith that the benefits of growth will trickle down to their level of society. This pessimistic mood raises serious implications for whether youngsters feel they have a stake in their country’s development.

Finally, we can note a striking convergence of opinions between the youth and the old with respect to whether the market is supplying job opportunities and consumer goods and closing the gap between the rich and poor. Opinions on the availability of consumer goods in comparison to previous years are more or less evenly split with, for instance, 42 percent of the youth (compared to 44 percent of the old) saying the situation is worse.

Table 13: Assessments Of A Market Economy

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
The availability of goods	42	44	-1
The availability of job opportunities	71	72	-1
The gap between the rich and the poor	66	66	-1

Please tell me whether each of the following aspects of our economic situation in this country are better or worse than they were a few years ago, or whether they have remained the same? Percent reporting “worse/ much worse”

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION (POLICY IMPLEMENTATION)

In this analysis, we ask if young and old Africans arrive at similar assessments of their political regimes and those who command them. Do the young feel encumbered in passing harsh and critical judgements of the performance of leaders and policies? We answer these questions with reference to several indicators: evaluations of (a). social services (b) economic management (c) policing (d) local government and (e) performance of elected leaders.

Table 14: Economic Management-Performance Evaluation

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Managing the economy	45	47	-1
Creating jobs	26	27	-1
Keeping prices stable	27	27	0
Narrowing gaps between rich and poor	23	24	-1

How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say? Percent saying “fairly well/very well”

Economic management is an area in which African regimes are not particularly strong. Less than half of the population is satisfied with government performance at managing the macro-economy and big majorities give their government failing marks in specific areas of economic policy. For instance, only 27 percent of both youth and older Africans grade their government as having done “fairly well/very well” in taming inflation (Table 14). Similar proportions of respondents express their dissatisfaction with government in job creation while less than a quarter (23 percent youth and 24 percent elders) are satisfied with government’s efforts to narrow gaps between the rich and the poor.

Table 15: Social Services – Evaluation Performance

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Improving basic health services	64	63	1
Addressing educational needs	67	68	-1
Delivering household water	48	49	-1
Ensuring everyone has enough to eat	34	36	-1
Managing HIV/Aids	70	69	1

How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? Percent saying "fairly well/very well"

There are mixed responses in the area of social services with governments scoring high marks in the delivery of health and education and managing the HIV/Aids scourge (table 15). However, ensuring that every citizen has a full stomach is an area of low government performance. No doubt food insecurity is still an issue of great concern to many Africans interviewed.

Table 16: Policing- Performance Evaluation

	Youth	Elderly
Fighting corruption	43	43
Reducing crime	53	53

How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? Percentage saying "fairly well/very well"

Fighting crime is one of the public goods that a functional state is expected to perform. Governments in sub-Saharan Africa are judged to be only marginally effective in their performance of this function with 53 percent of both young and older Africans giving some credit to governments (Table 16). However, they get failing marks for their efforts in fighting corruption with 43 percent of the youth and elders satisfied.

Table 17: Performance Evaluations- Local Government

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Maintaining roads	43	42	0
Keeping community clean	46	48	-2
Collecting local taxes	47	49	-1
Spending decisions	29	30	-1

What about local government? How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Percentage reporting "fairly well/very well"

Lower tiers of governments fare no better. As can be gleaned from Table 17, in no single policy area are local authorities given a pat on the back for their performance. In those policy areas where the respondents felt confident to judge (that is, sanitary and road maintenance), less than half of the youth and adults expressed satisfaction with the performance.

In sum, Africans in sub-Saharan Africa feel that the performance of their governments in the delivery of various services is lacklustre. More importantly, there is consensus on this across the age divide. Economic performance is one of the areas of almost complete agreement between the youth and elders.

Table 18: Political Leadership Performance

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
President	64	68	-4
Member of Parliament	50	52	-2
Local govt councillor	48	52	-4

Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Percentage saying "approve/strongly approve"

Is this the same judgement rendered with regard to the performance of elected leaders? In assessing public opinion on leadership performance, we focus on three elective positions: president, national legislative representative and local government councillor. As the Afrobarometer surveys are conducted only where the procedural minimum of democracy applies, that is, elections, we expect all three positions to be occupied by people who have been subjected to electoral contests. The question then is how effective are these leaders in representing their people.

For the first time in this section, we find a slight generation gap. Fewer youth than elders approve the performance of these leaders. This difference is most marked at the top and bottom of the leadership hierarchy. Younger people are significantly more likely to disapprove of the performance of the president who, as the personification of the incumbent government, may be blamed by younger respondents for their unemployment and uncertain economic future. Younger people are also significantly more likely to critique the performance of local government councillors. To the extent that local government in rural areas is intertwined with traditional authority, this result may reflect the exclusion of young people under gerontocracy. Or alternatively, it may reflect the frustration of youngsters who consider themselves better educated than the low-calibre elected leaders who often win office in local government contests, again especially in rural areas.

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

Social scientists agree that political legitimacy entails, at the very least, the *right* (and not the *might*) to rule and the right to be obeyed.⁷ As such, legitimacy is a critical and efficient resource for governance. The absence of legitimacy makes governing costly and in the long run unsustainable. Robert Dahl (1976:60) observes that leaders (and we would add *all leaders*), in a political system “try to endow their actions with legitimacy”. He adds that even though many different kinds of political systems can acquire legitimacy, “democracy may be more in need of it than most other systems” (ibid). Societies in transitions to democracy certainly need this vital political resource in order to make their journey less troublesome and less conflict-ridden. Without legitimacy, popular alienation and mass discontent can easily enter the system and the resultant scenario can be threatening to the stability and survival of the political regime.

In this analysis, we measure political legitimacy by the amount or level of trust that people say they have in their public institutions and their assessment of the gravity of the problem of corruption in their countries. The absence of institutional trust and the presence of public perceptions of corruption tends to erode the legitimacy of the regime.

On trust and political legitimacy, Anton Steen (1996:220) writes: “Trust in basic political and social institutions is regarded as a precondition to legitimate democracy” and that “confidence in institutions is fundamental to stable democracy” (ibid: 223). We first ask respondents “how much trust” they have in various key institutions including the president, legislature, army and police. How much trust do the youth and their elders invest in their public and governmental agencies? We would expect that, if the attitudes of the youth and elders match at a high level, this portends a high degree of political stability. Conversely, if the attitudes of the two groups match at a low level, this indicates low levels of legitimacy and accordingly a high potential for instability. And if their evaluations diverge at either level, then

⁷ Robert Dahl writes thus about legitimacy:... a government is said to be ‘legitimate’ if the people to whom its orders are directed believe that the structure, procedures, acts, decisions, policies, officials, or leaders of government possess the quality of ‘rightness,’ propriety, or moral goodness – the right, in short, to make binding rules (See Dahl Robert, *Modern Political Analysis* (3rd edition) Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1976: 60).

stabilizing a new democracy will be accordingly more difficult, especially if the youth, on whom the future of democracy depends, see less legitimacy than their elders.

A systematic finding in this analysis of institutional trust is that the youth are consistently *less* trusting than their elders. The biggest mismatches are in respect of the *executive agencies* of the state, such as the presidency, army and police, with a gap ranging between 6 and 8 percentage points. Young people are especially distrustful of the presidency in Kenya (by 10 points), Nigeria and Malawi (by 9 points). Interestingly, in a legacy perhaps inherited from former one-party states, people seem to regard the ruling party as part of this executive cluster. A somewhat smaller generation gap, between 2 and 5 percentage points, is present for *representative institutions* like the national assembly and electoral commission and *judicial institutions* like the courts of law. In sum, young people seem to be more politically alienated from the power centers of the state than from arenas in which their voices have some chance of being heard. Strikingly, they disagree most vigorously with their elders on the trustworthiness of the executive president.

It is worth noting, however, that the president is trusted by more people overall (60 percent of the youth and 68 percent of the elders) than trust the legislature. Though the president attracts the largest trust gap, this institution is also the *most* trusted, tied in a statistical dead heat with the armed forces (Table 19). Thus young people choose to dissent most vigorously from their elders around the iconic centre of political power, the presidency itself.

Table 21: Trust In Public Institutions, By Age Category

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
President	60	68	-8
National assembly	53	58	-5
Independent electoral commission	51	55	-4
Ruling party	52	59	-7
Opposition political parties	35	36	-1
Army	61	67	-6
Police	55	61	-6
Courts of law	61	63	-2

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Percent who say "somewhat/a lot"

At the other extreme, Africa's opposition parties attract the least trust from all adults. But the mismatch between the two age groups is negligible. Just over one fifth of the two categories expressed confidence in opposition political parties. This depth of political cynicism directed at a 'government-in-waiting' is a worrying finding especially given that one of the defining features of political reform was the dismantling of the one-party state and the introduction and unhindered functioning of opposition parties. Could it be that Africans are disappointed with the performance of these parties? Steen (1996: 224) speculates that:

If trust arises from the ability of institutions to produce positive policy outputs, confidence will depend upon how the outputs from institutions meet the expectations of the general public. Confidence will not stem from distrust as such, but from poor performance.

Obviously, given low levels of electoral turnover among leaders and parties in African democracies, most opposition parties have had little chance to amass a track record on which their performance can be judged. It is perhaps somewhat reassuring, therefore, that young people are no more likely than their elders to distrust opposition parties. Unlike with the presidency, opposition parties do not under-perform in inducing trust from young people, and young people do not seem predisposed to distrust them, at least no more than does the population at large.

However, it should be noted that that Africans are gradually *becoming less trustful* of their public institutions. Without exception, there is a systematic and sometimes dramatic loss of confidence in these institutions over time. In a space of just two years, virtually every institution shed at least nine percentage points in public trust levels⁸.

What evidence do we find on corruption and does it corroborate these patterns? Bratton et al. (2005: 232) argue that: “The best overall predictor of institutional trust is whether people think that state officials are corrupt”. In other words, we expect corruption to be corrosive of political legitimacy. To this end, the surveys asked respondents how much corruption they felt existed among officials and in institutions of the state they felt were corrupt.

As already suggested, the youth are more predisposed to saying state officials are corrupt. The police fare particularly badly on the Afrobarometer corruption indicators, and more so among the youth. Nearly half (48 percent) of the young Africans view the police with a jaundiced eye and among the nine government branches under review, the police are seen as by far the most corrupt, according to the verdict of the people. Though there is a significant perception gap (5 points) between the youth and their seniors, the same perception gap exists with respect to the office of the president. Next in the corruption rank are the people responsible for policy implementation at both the central and local government levels i.e. central and local government civil servants (32 percent for the youth and 28 percent for the elderly in both cases).

Table 20: Public Perceptions Of Corruption

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Office of the Presidency	25	20	5
Members of Parliament	28	24	4
Local govt officials	32	28	4
Police	48	43	5
National Govt officials	32	28	4
Tax officials	37	33	-15
Judges and Magistrate	28	27	1
Health officials	21	20	1
Teachers and school administrators	18	15	3

How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Percentage saying "most of them/all of them"

In sum, we have found that the youthful generation is less trustful of public institutions and perceive more corruption among state officials than the senior generation though the gap in trust is bigger than the gap in corruption perceptions. If corruption erodes people's trust in the institutions concerned, the resultant distrust also eats at the legitimacy of the regime. We can reasonably conclude that the youth invest less legitimacy in their political system than their elders.

POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

It is one thing to express support for democracy and its institutions or to be satisfied with the state of democracy in one's country. It is an entirely different matter to take part in the political activities and processes, whether at a micro or macro level. We are now moving our analysis from political attitudes to the realm of actual political behaviour and we do so by asking a number of varied but related questions.

⁸ See The Afrobarometer Network, “Afrobarometer Round 2: Compendium of Results from a 15-Country Survey.” 2004

Notwithstanding the rhetorical importance placed on youth rights in public affairs by many African leaders and increasing and justified concerns about ‘child soldiers’ in African conflict areas, the connections between age and political participation remain an opaque, grey area. In our analysis, we focus attention on both electoral and inter-electoral forms of participation. We first look at voting.

The clarion demand in struggles for popular self-determination across Africa has been for “one man, one vote.” In his pioneering study of elections in Zimbabwe, Jonathan Moyo (1992: 7) writes: “The opportunity to choose through periodic elections who will govern is widely held as the hallmark of a representative democracy”. Elections are part of Robert Dahl’s (1971) “procedural minimum” of democracy. Indeed, Almond and Powell celebrate elections as “the great act of mass participation in a democracy” (1963: 145). Are African youth more or less likely to participate in this ‘great act’ than their elders? Tables 21 through 23 present the relevant Afrobarometer data.

Generally, Africans are keen participants in voting as a political activity with up to 75 percent claiming to have voted in the elections prior to the 2005 survey⁹, an increase of four percentage points compared to the 2000 figure. However, this average statistic, like a bikini, hides more than it reveals. For our purposes, it obscures a systematic generation gap in electoral activity in which young people vote less than their elders *in every Afrobarometer country*. The gap is especially wide in places like Lesotho (43 points), where many young people are working outside the country. But it is meaningful and statistically significant even in Ghana (6 points), even where young people, like citizens in general, have taken to peaceful multiparty competition with alacrity.

Table 21: Electoral Participation, By Country

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Benin	80	95	-16
Botswana	52	79	-27
Cape Verde	43	86	-43
Ghana	84	90	-6
Kenya	44	81	-38
Lesotho	43	86	-43
Madagascar	57	88	-30
Malawi	69	89	-20
Mali	63	85	-22
Mozambique	71	89	-18
Namibia	65	92	-28
Nigeria	60	83	-23
Senegal	41	80	-40
South Africa	64	85	-21
Tanzania	59	95	-36
Uganda	66	93	-26
Zambia	45	77	-33
Zimbabwe	56	87	-31
Mean	59	86	-27

With regard to the most recent national elections, which statement is true for you? You voted in the elections.
“Percentage reporting yes”

⁹ To be sure, in very few countries is such a high voter turnout recorded, suggesting that the responses are inflated. But even if this is true, “over-reporting signifies that voting has become a socially desirable and politically correct norm” (Bratton et al. 2006: 36). For our purposes, the question is whether both the young and the old exhibit similar participatory behaviours.

As Table 22 also shows, a summary breakdown by age groups reveal striking evidence of differences between young Africans and their elders. On average, older Africans are almost half again as likely to vote in elections than their juniors. While nearly nine in ten elders voted in the latest elections (86 percent), less than six in ten (59 percent) of the youth embraced the opportunity to enter the ballot box to render judgement on who was to govern them. Several possible explanations spring to mind. The first and most obvious one is that young people are not registered as voters. Circa 2005, more than one-third of those under the age of 30 reported being unregistered and, as Table 22 shows, this figure swells to almost one half for those under the age of 25. Notably, the generation gap on registration was exactly the same size as the generation gap on voting (27 points in favour of elders), which suggests that difficulty in obtaining voter registration is the principal reason for youth abstention from voting.

Table 22: Electoral Participation

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
You voted in the elections	59	86	-27
You decided not to vote	1	1	0
You could not find the polling station	0	0	0
You were prevented from voting	0	1	-1
You did not have time to vote	1	1	0
Did not vote for some other reason	3	2	1
You were not registered	35	8	27
Don't know/Can't remember	0	0	0

With regard to the most recent national elections, which statement is true for you? You voted in the elections. Percent reporting “yes”.

Alternatively, some in the young age group may not have attained voting age at the time the most recent election, even if they had achieved this status at the time of the survey. We can control for this anomaly by dividing the youth group to cover only the 26-30 years age group who definitely could have voted in their country’s recent elections had they wanted to do so. While this procedure drastically reduces the size of the generation gap on voting, it does not eliminate it. And “older youngsters” (aged 26-30) are still more than twice as likely as “over 30’s” to be unregistered as voters.

Table 23: Electoral Participation 2005

Age groups	18-25	26-30	>30
You voted in the elections	48	77	86
You decided not to vote	1	1	1
You could not find the polling station	0	0	0
You were prevented from voting	1	0	1
You did not have time to vote	1	1	0
Did not vote for some other reason	3	4	2
You were not registered	47	16	8

With regard to the most recent national elections, which statement is true for you? You voted in the elections. Percent reporting “yes”

Another plausible explanation can be derived from the “life-course” approach to explaining political behaviour. The youth are in transition from childhood and young adulthood to middle age and tend to be a restless and rebellious group. For instance, Braungart and Braungart (1986) point out that “youth is the time to strive for independence, to form an identity, to search for fidelity, and to find the relationship between the self and society” and they argue that “these developmental characteristics are likely to make youth critical of their elders, society, and politics, and this has been interpreted by some to indicate that youth have a ‘predisposition’ to generational conflict, rebellion, and revolution” (ibid, 210).

Studies of age-old differences in voting participation consistently show that “the voting participation of older adults almost always surpasses that of young adults” (ibid, 211). Whatever the case may be, there is no disputing, from the evidence to date, that young Africans constitute their own *political generation* in the sense in which this term is used by Braungart and Braungart (1986: 217): “A political generation is said to come into existence when an age group rejects the existing order, joins together, and attempts to redirect the course of politics as its generational mission”.

Yet another possible explanation is the ‘exaggeration thesis’, that is, that respondents have a propensity to inflate their voting behaviour, and in our case, that the elders are more prone to exaggeration than their juniors. The youth may be more willing to reveal non-participation in an activity that is socially valued or desirable while the elders are more reticent or tempted to be so. In many African societies, and notwithstanding the impact of modernisation, the older citizens are still respected and regarded as repositories of wisdom. Given this context, and also that enumerators are invariably composed of young adults, the older citizens may feel a sense of shame in admitting to their juniors that they did not participate in something that is deemed socially desirable. Such an admission could be dishonourable in an age-based deferential society. The more youthful respondents feel no such sense of shame to admitting non-participation to their age-cohort interviewers. This line of explanation merits more serious investigation.

Apart from voting, respondents were probed about three main modes of participation outside the electoral arena: “attending a community meeting”; “joining with others to raise an issue” and “attending a demonstration/protest march” during the past year.

Table 24: Political Participation, By Age Group

	Young	Elderly	Difference
Community meeting	59	73	-14
Raise an issue	45	56	-11
Demonstration	13	13	0

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? “Percent yes, once or twice/several times/often”

We again find big participation gaps in respect of attending community meetings and joining others to raise issues (Table 27). The youth are apparently shy to participate and throughout the Afrobarometer family, they display lower levels of communal participation than their elders (Table 25). Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that younger people have yet to establish themselves – both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others – as members of good standing in a community, with a stake in collective welfare.

Table 25: Political Participation

	Community meeting			Raise issue			Attend protest		
	Youth	Elderly	Difference	Youth	Elderly	Difference	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Benin	48	62	-14	31	43	-12	12	12	0
Botswana	57	82	-25	55	59	-4	19	17	2
Cape Verde	38	33	5	41	30	11	15	5	10
Ghana	46	62	-16	44	54	-10	9	6	3
Kenya	59	81	-22	54	68	-15	14	12	3
Lesotho	65	92	-27	51	77	-26	4	3	1
Madagascar	88	93	-5	66	74	-7	15	12	3
Malawi	81	79	2	34	39	-4	10	5	5
Mali	48	67	-20	22	38	-16	7	6	1
Mozambique	71	80	-9	65	73	-8	20	25	-5
Namibia	45	71	-26	26	49	-23	13	25	-13
Nigeria	42	63	-21	39	57	-17	15	17	-3
Senegal	59	67	-8	41	48	-7	16	15	1
South Africa	55	63	-7	42	47	-5	26	25	1
Tanzania	73	86	-13	61	75	-13	14	18	-4
Uganda	72	87	-15	57	72	-15	10	10	0
Zambia	57	72	-15	38	48	-10	10	10	0
Zimbabwe	54	75	-21	50	60	-11	10	7	3
Mean	59	73	-14	45	56	-11	13	13	1

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? Percent reporting “yes, once or twice/several times/often”

However, the generation gap is completely closed with regard to participation in protest activities. For both age groups, only 13 percent said they had participated in a protest march in the previous year. Yet protesting is easily the highest form of peaceful political participation and both young and old are reluctant to get involved in protest. But fewer young people than old (42 versus 52 percent) profess that they “would never” partake in such protest activity. Overall, this greater propensity to participate in protest activity than their elders is the case in eleven of the eighteen countries under study.

Are The Youth Less Interested In Politics?

The *World Development Report 2007* makes two observations with regard to the youth and citizenship. The first is that in high and medium income countries there have been measurable declines in political participation, interest in politics, and membership in civic organisations among the youth. The second observation stems from the question: “Is declining interest (in politics by the youth) visible in developing countries?” (2007:162). The report answers the question with a rather categorical ‘No’, “at least not in low-income countries” and that for these countries, “youth interest in politics might actually be rising” (ibid.). What is the evidence from Afrobarometer data?

Looking across time, we confirm that interest in politics among African youth is indeed rising. Whereas circa 2000, some 57 percent of young people scored themselves as “somewhat” or “very” interested in politics in the 12 African countries surveyed, by 2005, this proportion had risen to 64 percent in the 18 countries surveyed. Moreover, the proportion expressing interest was even higher (67 percent) when the original 12 countries are considered in isolation, which is the more appropriate comparison.

Nonetheless, Table 26 shows that African youth in 2005 are significantly less interested in things political than their elders and are no more likely to discuss public affairs. There is also a generalised feeling of

political inefficacy with up to almost seven in ten African adults expressing a sense of subjective political incompetence; 67 percent of the youth and 64 percent of their elders find politics and government rather too complicated to decipher. Similarly, just over a third of all Africans feel that they can influence people around them on political matters.

Table 26: Political Efficacy and Interest in Politics by Age

Political interest	Youth	Elderly
Interest in politics (<i>somewhat/very interested</i>)	64	68
When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters (<i>occasionally/frequently</i>)	69	68
Political efficacy		
Politics and government sometimes seem so complicated that you can't really understand what's going on (<i>agree/strongly agree</i>)	67	64
*As far as politics are concerned, friends and neighbours do not listen to you. (<i>disagree/strongly disagree</i>)	31	32

*How interested would you say you are in public affairs? When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters? *Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*

Though there are wide differences in educational attainment between the two generations, a relative lack of education does not apparently deter older people from taking an interest in or discussing politics. The same holds for the older generation's disadvantage in access to all types of news media, whether radio, television, or newspapers (see Table 27). But perhaps common feelings of political powerlessness leave both the youth and adults discouraged from becoming more active citizens.

Table 27: Sources of Political Information (2005)

Radio		TV		Newspapers	
Youth	Elderly	Youth	Elderly	Youth	Elderly
87	83	52	42	39	29

How often do you get news from the following sources? Percent reporting "a few times a month/week/everyday"

Partisan Affiliation

Another measure of political interest and political participation is affiliation with political parties. Are Africans partisans? Our evidence (Table 28) indicates that most Africans, both young and old are closely associated with the numerous political parties that have entered the political landscape in post-authoritarian Africa. At the aggregate level, 59 percent youths and 64 percent of elders feel close to a political party. Though the generation gap in party association is not substantial (-5 percent), the elders display more partisanship than their juniors.

Table 28: Party Affiliation

Party identity	Youth	Elderly	Difference
No	38	32	6
Yes	59	64	-5

Do you feel close to any particular political party?

The pattern of youth lagging behind elders in partisan association is confirmed at the country level even though this general pattern hides wide differences both within countries and between them. On a region level, Southern Africans (with the odd exception of Zambians) record high levels of partisan affiliation while West Africans seem to refrain from too close association with political parties. One reason may be that liberation movements in Southern Africa relied on a strategy of mass mobilization and, unlike in West Africa, many of these parties have survived as dominant entities even following democratic transitions. It is in this light that the Zambian experience becomes more understandable: the founding

party of the nationalist era (UNIP) was displaced at the polls by a loose opposition movement (MMD) that has never been able to establish the same degree of dominance of the party system as its predecessor.

Table 29: Party Affiliation By Country

	Youth	Elderly	Difference
Benin	34	32	1
Botswana	75	81	-6
Cape Verde	50	51	0
Ghana	68	65	3
Kenya	61	67	-6
Lesotho	67	81	-14
Madagascar	38	38	0
Malawi	61	62	-1
Mali	57	63	-5
Mozambique	79	85	-6
Namibia	75	88	-13
Nigeria	46	46	0
Senegal	44	59	-15
South Africa	62	65	-3
Tanzania	71	79	-9
Uganda	60	64	-5
Zambia	47	58	-11
Zimbabwe	63	66	-3
Mean	59	64	-5

Do you feel close to any particular political party? Percent reporting "yes"

What Explains The Generation Gap In Political Participation And Trust In Institutions?

To draw the analysis to a close, we seek to account for mass political participation and popular trust in institutions. To explore a range of prospective determinants, we use identical ordinary least squares regression procedures in which standardised coefficients are reported for the principal influences in each model (Table 30). The aim is to place considerations of age in a broader context and to determine whether age is still important when other formative influences are taken into account.

For each of the dependent variables (participation and trust), the first model looks at the impact of age only and the second one looks at age in relation to a number of variables that have been grouped as follows:

- Structural factors- including age, habitat (rural or urban), gender, and employment status;
- Cognitive factors- education, radio, television and newspapers (sources of political information);
- Attitudes to democracy- satisfaction with democracy and party affiliation;
- Assessments of leadership performance and policy evaluations that have been divided into three sections, (i) social services (government's handling of education, health, household water, managing hunger and HIV-Aids), (ii) economic management (job creation, general management of the economy, keeping prices stable and narrowing the income gap) and (iii) policing (reducing crime and fighting corruption).

As well as being interesting in their own right, these other factors act as controls for the possibility that age differences in participation and trust as reported earlier in this paper are really due to other considerations.

As the dependent variable in the first model, we constructed a single *index of political participation*¹⁰ from ten separate indicators.. These ten variables were all first recoded on a four item scale ranging from 0 for no participation to 3 for the highest level of participation. The following items were used to construct this scale: discussing politics¹¹, participation in community meetings, joining with others to raise an issue, plus contacting a political party official, a local councilor, a government official, a religious leader, a traditional leader, an influential person and a member of the national assembly¹².

As the dependent variable in the second model, we constructed another index called *trust in institutions*¹³ from the following variables: trust in the presidency, the national assembly, the independent electoral commission, the army, the police, the courts of law and the ruling party.

As for independent variables, three separate indices were constructed for policy implementation: *a social services index, an economic management index, and a policing index*¹⁴. Another index¹⁵ called *leadership performance* was constructed from the three indicators: assessments of the performance of the president, local government councilors and members of the national assembly.

Political Participation

Age alone accounts for just about 3 percent of the variation in political participation. Yet, when other factors are taken into consideration as shown in the second model, the proportion of variation explained improves to almost 15 percent. Together, the structural factors presented in model 2 provide the strongest explanations for political participation. And, most importantly, age remains the strongest structural explanation for political participation. Even when alternative explanations are included, the standardized coefficient for age declines only modestly from Beta .162 to .150. The only stronger predictor on the whole model is party affiliation (Beta .161), which leads the way in understanding why people participate. All told, however, we are led to believe that, other things being equal, the generation gap in political participation is real in Africa and that young people are systematically less likely than their elders to take part in the political procedures of new democratic regimes.

¹⁰ Factor analysis showed that the ten items formed a single scale, explaining 34.327 percent of the variance, and reliable with Cronbach's Alpha =.769.

¹¹ A blank was inserted into the initial response categories to put it on the same scale as the other factors 0=never, 1=blank, 2=occasionally and 3=frequently.

¹² All responses were coded on a 4 point scale from 0=never, 1=would if had chance, 2= yes, once/twice and 3=yes, a few times/often

¹³*Trust in institutions*-Factor analysis showed that the 7 factors formed 1 scale, explaining 60.686 percent of the variance and reliable with Cronbach's Alpha =.892 All seven items were on the same four point scale from 0- not at all to 3- a very great deal

¹⁴ *Policy implementation index- social service*

Factor analysis revealed that the factors formed 1 item, explaining variance of 52.807 and reliable with Cronbach's Alpha=.772

Economic management

Factor analysis showed the items forming 1 factor, explaining 64.681 percent of the variance and reliable with Cronbach's Alpha =.817

Policing

A two item construct of government performance in reducing crime and fighting corruption was used to come up with the index on policing. Alpha = .594 All performance items coded on a 3 point scale from 1 badly/very badly to 3 well/very well

¹⁵ *Political performance index*

Factor analysis produced 1 factor explaining 68.688 percent of the variance and reliable with Cronbach's Alpha = .770 All three items were on the same scale from 0-strongly disapprove to 2 strongly approve

Trust In Institutions

When we use the same group of factors to explain institutional trust, we encounter a much more robust explanation that accounts for almost half of the observed variance (some 48 percent). Moreover, institutional trust depends centrally on leadership performance (Beta .369). The performance of the incumbents of key institutions – presidency, parliament and local government – are thus critical for trust building. The impact of political performance is more than twice that of the second most influential variable, namely satisfaction with democracy (Beta .162).

By contrast, structural factors are less influential in determining institutional trust. Moreover, the impact of age decreases when other factors are taken into account (down from .108 to .042). But the important point is that age remains statistically significant even in an encompassing and more fully specified model. The implication is clear: while instrumental considerations of performance are more important, and while these considerations cut across generations, age cannot and should not be left out of a comprehensive explanation of the sources of political legitimacy. In this regard, we continue to confirm that young people regard state institutions as less legitimate than do their elders.

Table 30: Determining Factors

	Political participation		Trust in institutions	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Constant	4.916***	.844	9.117***	-1.919***
Structural factors				
Age	.162***	.150***	.108***	.042***
Urban or Rural		.122***		.031***
Gender of respondent		-.142***		-.018
Employment status		.048***		-.057***
Cognition				
Education		.066***		-.103***
Radio		.076***		.038***
Television		-.111***		-.074***
Newspapers		.099***		.012***
Attitudes to democracy				
Satisfaction with democracy		.004		.162***
Party affiliation		.161***		.075***
Leadership performance index		.043***		.369***
Policy performance indices				
Social services		-.017		.056***
Economic management		-.025		.096***
Policing		.067***		.120***
Adj. R Squared	.027	.145	.012	.478

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has searched for generational differences between younger African adults and their elders and to place age gaps in context as part of comprehensive explanations of political participation and political legitimacy.

First, we find that, at the aggregate level, there are few meaningful differences between the two generational groups in respect of political regime preferences. Both the young and the old prefer democracy to any of its competing alternatives. Even at the country level, the vast majority of citizens in the 18-country study prefer democracy. They also overwhelmingly reject democracy's authoritarian alternatives.

Secondly, we find that the youth are slightly more positive in their macro- and micro-economic evaluations irrespective of the time frame used, whether the present or future. Young and elderly share the same negative assessments with regard to policy performance. Political leaders also receive just modest average (for the MP and councillor) or moderately high (for the president) evaluations.

We do find sizeable differences between the youth and their elders with regard to perception of corruption and the trust citizens have in their public institutions. The youth are persistently less trusting than their elders and consistently perceive more corruption. Only the president and the army receive lukewarm endorsements. Africans are becoming more sceptical and less confident about their governance institutions; the youth more so than their seniors. This has serious implications for the consolidation of these institutions, especially when the youth have little faith in them.

Lastly, we find striking differences in the political behaviour of the youth and elders, especially in respect of voting. Due mainly to obstacles to voter registration for young people, the elders are more participatory in elections than their juniors.. There are also big generational gaps with regard to other forms of non-electoral activity (like attending community meetings and raising issues). Moreover, the youth, though more educated and informed, exhibit less interest in politics but are no less efficacious than the older adults. Finally, the youth are less partisan than the elderly generation.

From our analysis, we can conclude that age is not the only influential factor when it comes to explaining political participation, even though it has more explanatory power than most other factors in this case. We must thus caution against a reductionist approach that reduces all differences in political activism to age. Across the ages, Africans share similar attitudes and the differences cannot be explained predominantly by age. It is therefore important to point out that the youth are a highly mobile group, constantly in search of better prospects from education to jobs and this affects the time they can commit to political involvement. This is true in forms of participation that require the physical presence of the actor such as in voting and community activism. Registering to vote and checking the register all compete with time that can be devoted to pursuing other personally rewarding prospects. This is partly the point that the *World Development Report 2007* is making when it observes that "young people may vote less frequently because they have less experience with politics and are less socially and politically integrated than adults" (2006: 169). The youth may also feel more excluded from mainstream political life and if so, then remedial interventions need to be taken at the level of the political leadership.

What can be done?

1. Keeping the youths interested and engaged in politics is critical for the stability of African regimes. Measures to recapture their enthusiasm as demonstrated by university student activism in the 1980s must be considered. One way is to make politics appealing may be found in the way Pentecostalism has reformatted Christianity to appeal to the youth.

2. Electoral participation in particular is an affirmation of one's effect on politics and for many, it is the only way to exert influence. Voter registration strategies that are specifically targeted for the young in their spaces- universities, schools, electronic media and persistent displays at youth gatherings are likely to inculcate desirable participation values in them.
3. Minimise disillusionment with the entire political system by (a) encouraging transparency in the political parties and the candidates and (b) providing full information on national politics (c) playing the democratic game according to the rules so that the youth know that their vote does make a difference. The idealistic nature of the youth makes it more likely for them to re-engage if conditions are favourable. And this is more so when they can have space to express themselves. Their preoccupations and concerns differ from those of adults and politicians tend to lump them with everyone else.
4. Addressing the rampant unemployment would go a long way to assuring the political stability of African regimes. Stemming rural-urban migration is another issue that requires attention so that rural areas can have manpower that can be harnessed for development.
5. To recapture the declining trust of Africa's youth demands requires strengthening the efforts to 'cleanse' public institutions of the corruption bug and generally enhancing the capacity of public institutions to deliver much-valued public goods.
6. Lastly, the youth must be made to feel they are an integral part of their society and not excluded members of it. In short, the youth must be made active citizens rather than passive ones; they must be made to feel "at home" in their political and economic system

Appendix A

Afrobarometer Round 3		
Dates of Fieldwork	Sample Size	Dates of Fieldwork
--	1198	Apr. 22 – May 10, 2005
June 21 – July 23, 2003	1200	May 28 – June 12, 2005
June 3 – June 14, 2002	1256	Mar. 28 – Apr. 9, 2005
Aug. 29 – Sep. 11, 2002	1197	Mar. 10 – 21, 2005
Aug. 17 – Sep. 23, 2003	1278	Sept. 6 – 28, 2005
Feb. 24 – Apr. 7, 2003	1161	July 6 – Aug. 13, 2005
--	1350	May 19 – June 28, 2005
Apr. 29 – May 18, 2003	1200	June 16 – July 4, 2005
Oct. 25 – Nov. 23, 2002	1244	June 20 – July 7, 2005
Aug. 11 – Aug. 21, 2002	1198	June 13 – 26, 2005
Aug. 15 – Sep. 28, 2003	1200	Feb. 13 – Mar. 7, 2006
Oct. 13 – Oct. 29, 2003	2363	Aug. 28 – Dec. 31, 2005
Nov. 29 – Dec. 18, 2002	1200	Sept. 26 – Oct. 8, 2005
Sept. 13 – Oct. 13, 2002	2400	Feb. 6 – 28, 2006
July 5 – Aug. 6, 2003	1304	July 21 – Aug. 13, 2005
Aug. 13 – Sep. 5, 2002	2400	Apr. 12 – May 4, 2005
May 8 – June 5, 2003	1200	July 29 – Aug. 16, 2005
Apr. 26 – May 17, 2004	1048	Oct. 9 – 28, 2005
June 3, 2002 – May 17, 2004	25,397	Mar. 10, 2005 – Mar. 7, 2006

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