

Working Paper No. 152

Are South Africa's youth really a 'ticking time bomb'?

by Robert Mattes and Samantha Richardson

Working Paper No. 152

Are South Africa's youth really a 'ticking time bomb'?

by Robert Mattes and Samantha Richardson | January 2015

Robert Mattes is a professor in the Department of Political Studies and director of the Democracy in Africa Research Unit in the Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town. Email: robert.mattes@uct.ac.za.

Samantha Richmond is Afrobarometer programme manager with the Democracy in Africa Research Unit in the Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town. Email: samantha.richmond@uct.ac.

Abstract

This paper reviews longitudinal survey data on South Africa's political culture produced by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (1994-1998) and Afrobarometer (2000-2011) and finds that while there are real problems with democratic citizenship in South Africa, these problems are largely not peculiar to young people. Compared to other age cohorts, the youth (aged 18-25 years) of South Africa have the same conception of the role of citizen and are no more likely to endorse political violence or to hold negative views and intentions toward immigrants. They have slightly lower levels of cognitive engagement and cognitive sophistication than some other age cohorts and are less likely to engage in political processes. They also exhibit low levels of support for democracy – a problem they share with their elders.

Introduction

Ever since high school students sparked the watershed Soweto uprisings 38 years ago, South Africans have held – often simultaneously – contradictory beliefs about young people and politics. On one hand, reflecting a romanticized memory of Soweto and the street battles of the 1980s, many people see youth as the primary catalyst of activism and political change. Most of the country's political parties still maintain youth organisations, some of which are given news media coverage far out of proportion to their actual influence on electoral politics or public policy (Bauer, 2011). On the other hand, driven by media depictions of youth unemployment, township protests, and the antics of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League, often accompanied by images of burning tires, scattered garbage, blockaded roads, stone throwing, and destroyed private and public property, a wide range of commentators routinely experience “moral panic” about the apparent “crisis” of youth and its corrosive effect on the country's political culture (for a review of this phenomenon during the 1990s, see Seekings, 1996).

These images endure in the face of systematic evidence to the contrary. While public opinion surveys are regularly conducted in South Africa by government, civil society, news media, and universities, it is surprising how rarely important empirical findings and trends on political issues inform political discourse. This is certainly true of youth and political participation. Indeed, many South African researchers still resist modern methods of evidence collection to measure political participation. The Centre for Public Participation, for example, between 2005 and 2008 published an annual journal on public participation called *Critical Dialogue: Public Participation in Review*, based almost entirely on qualitative research with small, unrepresentative samples of individuals in the Durban and broader KwaZulu Natal areas. Similarly, the African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy at the University of the Western Cape's School of Governance has produced a variety of research in the areas of citizenship, participation, development, and democracy, most if not all of it based on qualitative methodologies with small, unrepresentative samples of individuals in Cape Town and the broader Western Cape.

In this paper, we review a wide range of longitudinal survey data spanning the first two decades of South Africa's democracy and find that there are indeed real problems with the country's political culture, particularly in the area of citizenship. At the same time, this data clearly shows that these problems are largely *not* peculiar to young people. Across a range of indicators, we find consistently that there are no or only minor age profiles to most dimensions of South African political culture. As a recent analysis of the Born Free generation (defined here as people who have come of age politically since the passage of the 1996 Constitution) concluded, “[r]ather than re-drawing the country's main cleavages along lines of age and generation (as in post-war Germany), many of the key fault lines of apartheid (such as race, urban-rural residence, class, and poverty) have been replicated within the new generation” (Mattes, 2012).

The concept of political culture

Questions about youth and citizenship in democratic South Africa are essentially questions about what political scientists call political culture. Besides issues of how to measure and classify a country's political culture, political scientists' prime concern is whether a given country's political culture is congruent with the demands or limitations placed on citizens by the existing political system (Almond & Verba, 1963; Eckstein, 1966, 1969). In other words, are South Africans, especially young South Africans, willing and able to play the roles required of them by the new democratic political system?

A country's political culture is normally defined as a set of norms or beliefs about four distinct political referents (for variations on this classificatory scheme, see Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton, 1965; and Norris, 1998). First, do people accept the officially defined *national political community*? In our case, do people identify themselves as South Africans, take pride in that

identity, and want to pass that identity on to their children? Second, what do people believe about the existing *political regime*? Do South Africans believe that democracy is the most appropriate form of government? Or would they prefer the country to be governed in non-democratic ways? Third, how do people view the country's *political institutions* and the incumbents who fill them? Do South Africans feel that the laws made by Parliament and the decisions of the courts and other law enforcement and regulatory agencies are legitimate, and thus binding upon them? Fourth, the study of political culture focuses on *citizenship*. How do South Africans understand their *role as citizens, both in relation to the state and toward other people*? Do they see themselves as efficacious? Are they engaged with the political process? And are they willing to extend relevant rights to those who are different from them in terms of political persuasion, race, ethnicity, or national citizenship? It is this citizenship dimension of political culture to which we turn our primary attention in this paper, though we will also consult evidence about the first three dimensions in order to contextualize and understand any differences in how young people view themselves as political actors.

South Africa's political culture

What do we know about South Africa's political culture in the post-apartheid era? In terms of *political community*, South Africans exhibit an almost consensual national identity of which they are proud and that they wish to pass on to their children (Mattes, 2002; Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005). When it comes to the *political regime*, however, South Africans pay minimal lip service to the idea of democracy, compared to citizens of other sub-Saharan countries. Significant minorities are willing to countenance one-party rule or strong-man dictatorship, especially if these regimes could promise economic development. And because they tend to equate democracy with equalizing economic outcomes, they may simply believe that those regimes are consistent with democracy (Mattes & Thiel, 1998; Mattes, 2001; Bratton & Mattes, 2001; Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Mattes & Bratton, 2007). At the same time, South Africans display relatively high levels of acceptance of the legitimacy of the country's *political institutions*, especially law and law enforcement institutions.

Finally, and most importantly, there are major deficiencies at the level of *citizenship*. While majorities of South Africans are interested in politics and speak about it with friends and colleagues, they exhibit particularly low levels of political efficacy and actual engagement with the political system. Voter turnout decreased by 30 percentage points between the 1994 and 2005 elections, recovering only slightly in 2009. The same patterns are evident with regard to levels of interest and participation in election campaigns (Mattes, 2011a; Glenn & Mattes, 2012; Schreiner & Mattes, 2012). And between elections, public contact with members of Parliament (MPs) is rare, though interaction with local councillors increased substantially after the installation of single-member wards in 2000. In contrast to citizens in other sub-Saharan multi-party systems, South Africans do not see it as their job to hold elected legislators or councillors accountable for their performance between elections, preferring to leave it to the political party or the president. Yet while South Africans exhibit some of the lowest levels of conventional political participation in Africa, they also display some of the highest levels of political protest (Mattes, 2008; Glenn & Mattes, 2012). And while South Africans personally identify with the new South Africa, they are not necessarily willing to accept others as part of that community, with the same rights and freedoms. South Africans display high levels of intolerance of political difference (Gibson & Gouws, 2003). They also exhibit the highest levels of xenophobia measured anywhere in the world (Mattes, Taylor, McDonald, Poore, & Richmond, 2000; for a recent and comprehensive review of this evidence, see Mattes, 2011b).

Our question is whether these numerous cultural maladies are present across generations or reside disproportionately amongst the youngest, most recent entrants into the body politic. As noted above, popular wisdom would lean in the latter direction. South Africa's youth are generally seen as disengaged from conventional forms of political participation such as voting or contacting elected officials but disproportionately more likely to engage in protest

and political violence. The usual reasons for this are assumed to be that young people are apathetic or alienated from the political process or that they have internalized values that radically reject the new, democratic South Africa.

The evidentiary basis for our analysis consists of a series of longitudinal surveys of the country's political culture carried out by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) (1994, 1995, 1997, 1998) and Afrobarometer (2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011). Each survey used random, stratified, nationally representative area probability samples and conducted face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice. Sample sizes were generally 2,400, which provide national results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level, with larger margins around sub-national estimates, such as for differing age cohorts. In order to compare South Africa's youth with older cohorts, we disaggregate the results into four age groups. Using the standard international definition, "youth" are defined as those aged 18-25 years (see for example www.social.un.org). "Younger adults" fall into the 26-45 age range, "middle-aged adult" respondents are 46-65, and "senior citizens" are 66 and older.

South Africa's youth as citizens

To examine the degree to which young South Africans see themselves as citizens and engage in the political process, we first explore how people understand their role as citizens and how this varies by age. Second, we assess South Africans' levels of "cognitive engagement," that is, the extent to which they are actively interested in and discuss politics with family and friends. Third, we examine indicators of "cognitive sophistication," or the degree of information and awareness they possess that would enable them to engage with the political process as critical citizens.

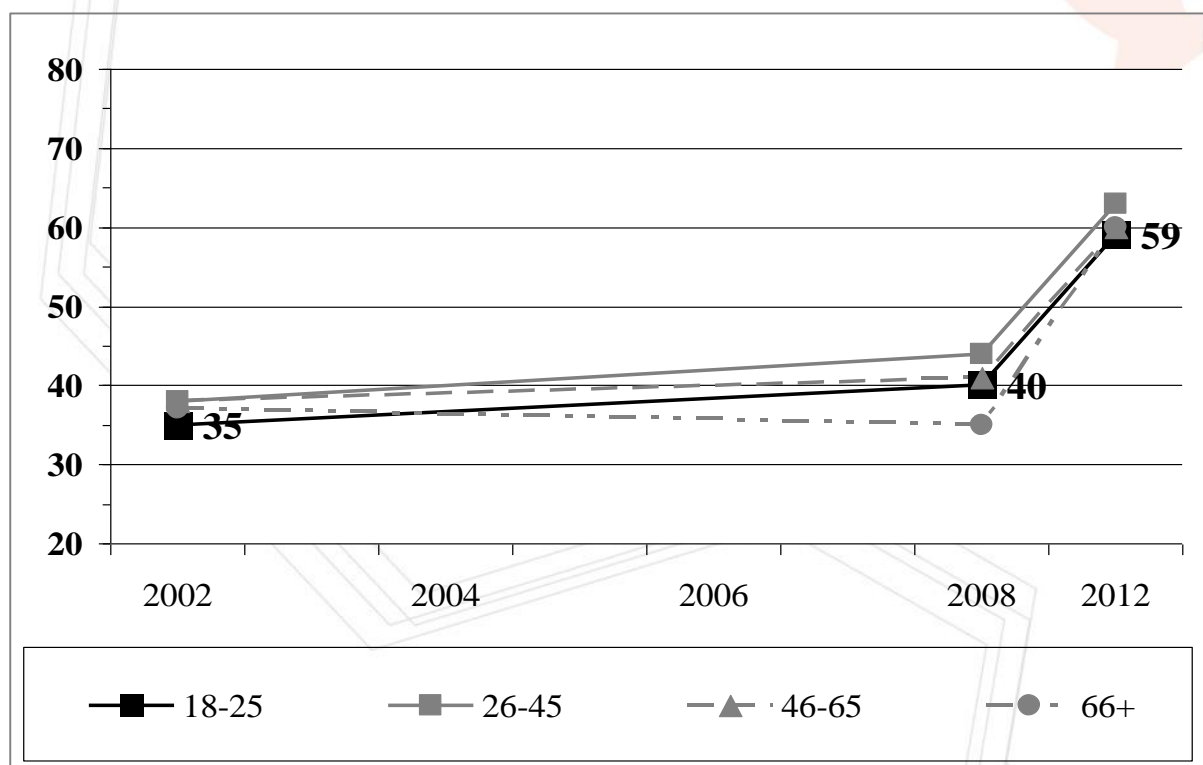
Following these key preliminary indicators of citizenship, we turn to levels of political engagement. Political scientists have found that political participation consists of discrete dimensions that are not necessarily cumulative. People who participate in more demanding forms of participation, such as contacting and persuading elected officials, are not necessarily more likely to take part in less demanding forms, such as voting. Rather, people tend to specialize in different types or dimensions of participation (Dalton, 2008). Some people tend to focus on individual forms of participation, such as voting, campaigning, or contacting elected representatives or government officials. Others focus on more "communal" forms of participation, such as attending community meetings or joining with others to solve local issues. Still others tend to focus on what Dalton (2008) calls "unconventional" dimensions, specializing in things such as protest or even political violence.

Role as citizen

How do South Africans understand the role of a citizen, and does this vary by age? In general, South Africans believe that democratic citizenship entails criticism and popular control of government. In 2011, 61% of survey respondents agreed with the statement, *"The government is like our employee. We are the bosses and should tell government what to do"* (as opposed to the statement, *"The government is like a parent. It should decide what is good for us"*) (see Figure 1). In response to a question last asked in the 2008 survey, 60% also agreed with the statement, *"We should be more active in questioning the actions of our leader"* (as opposed to, *"We should show more respect for authority"*) (see Figure 2). However, South Africans are far less likely to see it as their responsibility to hold elected officials to account. When asked who should be responsible for making sure that local councillors and MPs "do their jobs," only 21% and 15%, respectively, said "the voters." Most

assigned this task to “the party” or “the president” (not shown). However, we see virtually no age-related differences in the responses to these three questions (see Figures 1 and 2).¹

Figure 1: Citizens should control government



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: The government is like a parent. It should decide what is good for us.

Statement 2: The government is like our employee. We are the bosses and should tell government what to do.

(% agreeing with Statement 2)

¹ Between 2008 and 2011, Afrobarometer made a slight change in the wording of this question, which may account for the difference in responses across this time period.

In 2008, the question was worded as:

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: People are like children; the government should take care of them like a parent.

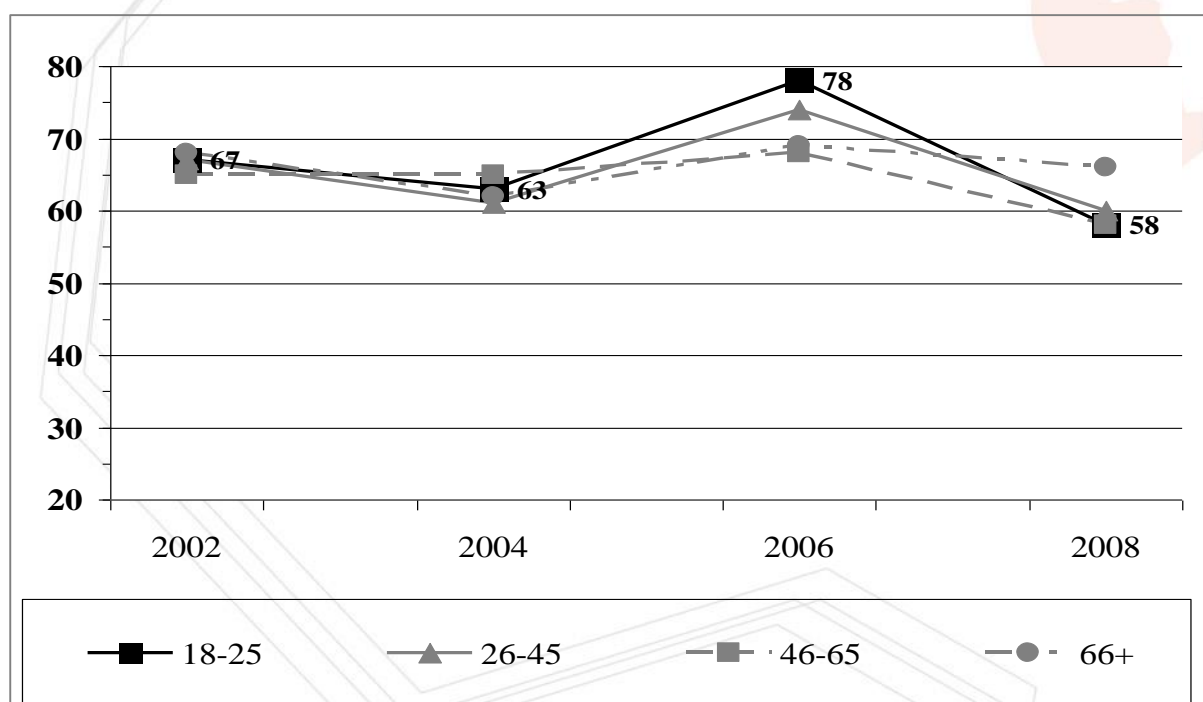
Statement 2: Government is like an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government.

In 2011, the question was worded as:

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: The government is like a parent. It should decide what is good for us.

Statement 2: The government is like our employee. We are the bosses and should tell government what to do.

Figure 2: Citizens should question leaders

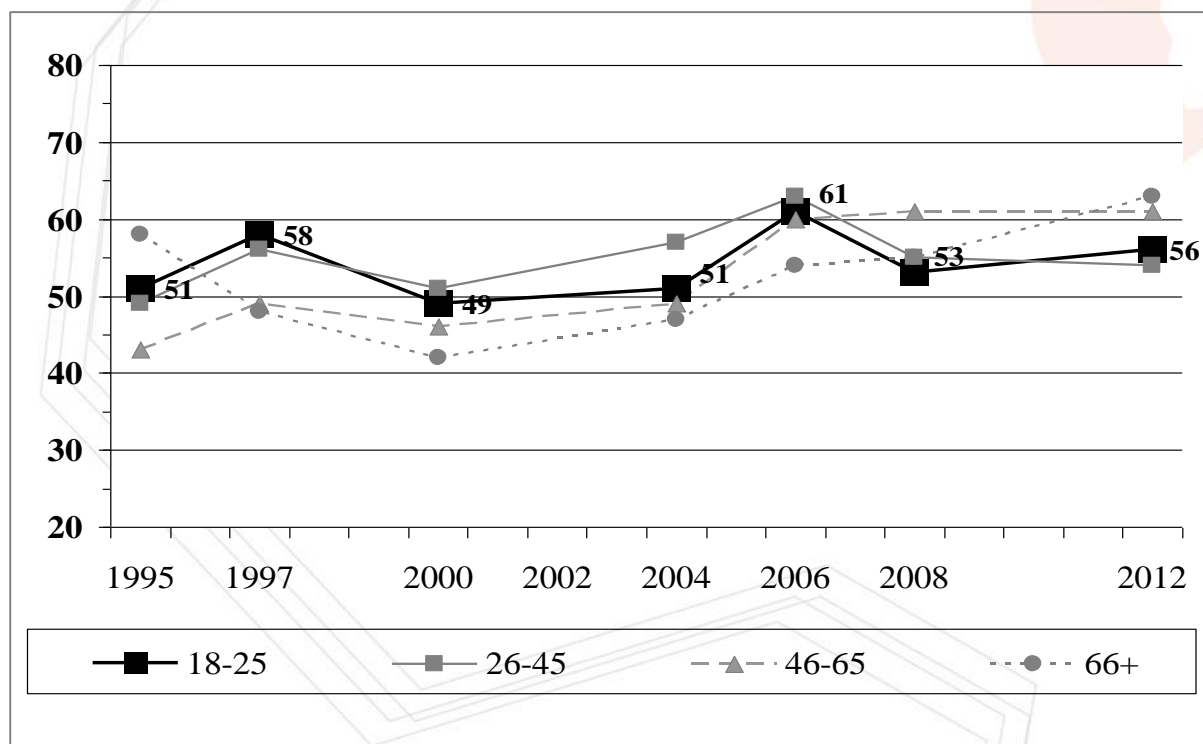
Respondents were asked: Let's talk for a moment about the kind of society we would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.
 Statement 1: Citizens should be more active in questioning the actions of leaders.
 Statement 2: In our country, citizens should show more respect for authority.
 (% agreeing with Statement 1)

Cognitive engagement

To what extent are South Africans, and in particular young South Africans, mentally engaged with the political process? We examine two elements of cognitive engagement: the degree to which they are interested in public affairs and the degree to which they discuss "political matters" with family and friends. As of the 2011 Afrobarometer survey, 56% of all adults said they were "somewhat" or "very" interested in public affairs (Figure 3), and 71% talked about political matters with friends or family "occasionally" or "frequently" (Figure 4).

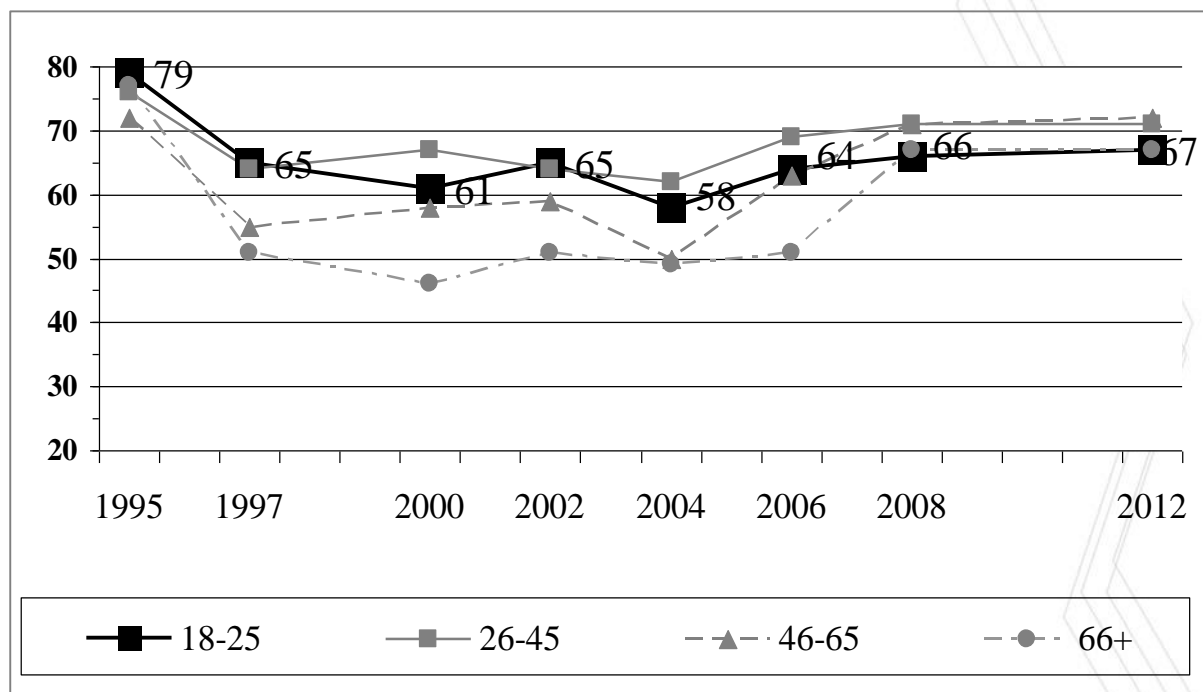
Again, there are only small differences across age groups within each survey year, and no consistent differences amongst the cohorts across time. In 2011, youth were not statistically different from younger adults in their level of interest (56% and 54%) and only slightly less interested than middle-aged adults (61%) or senior citizens (63%). Between 1997 and 2006, youth often displayed the highest levels of interest of all age groups. In fact, with the exception of the first (1994) and most recent (2011) surveys, it is senior citizens who have consistently shown the least interest in politics (Figure 3). The same general trends characterize political discussion. As of the 2011 survey, there was at most a 5 percentage point difference between the youngest and oldest age cohorts, and it is senior citizens who from 1997 to 2006 were consistently least likely to talk about politics (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Political interest



Respondents were asked: How interested would you say you are in public affairs? (% saying "somewhat interested" or "very interested")

Figure 4: Political discussion

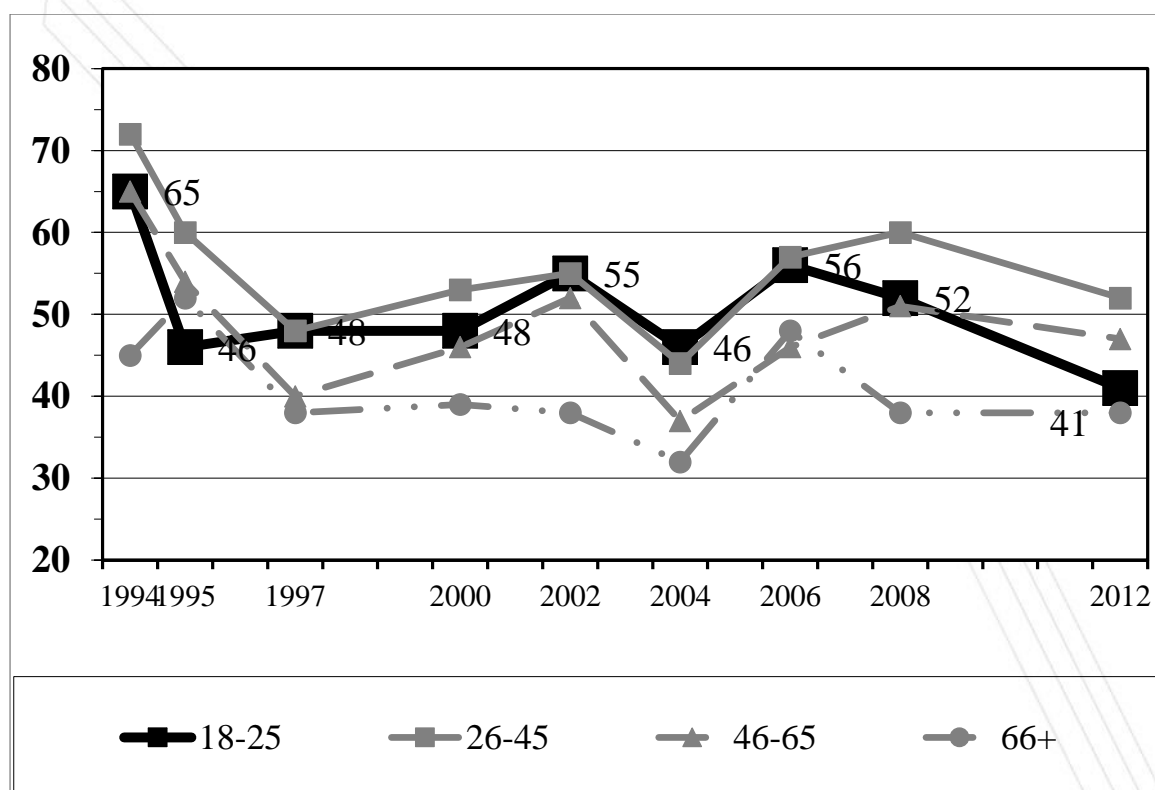


Respondents were asked: When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters ____? (% saying "occasionally" or "frequently")

Cognitive sophistication

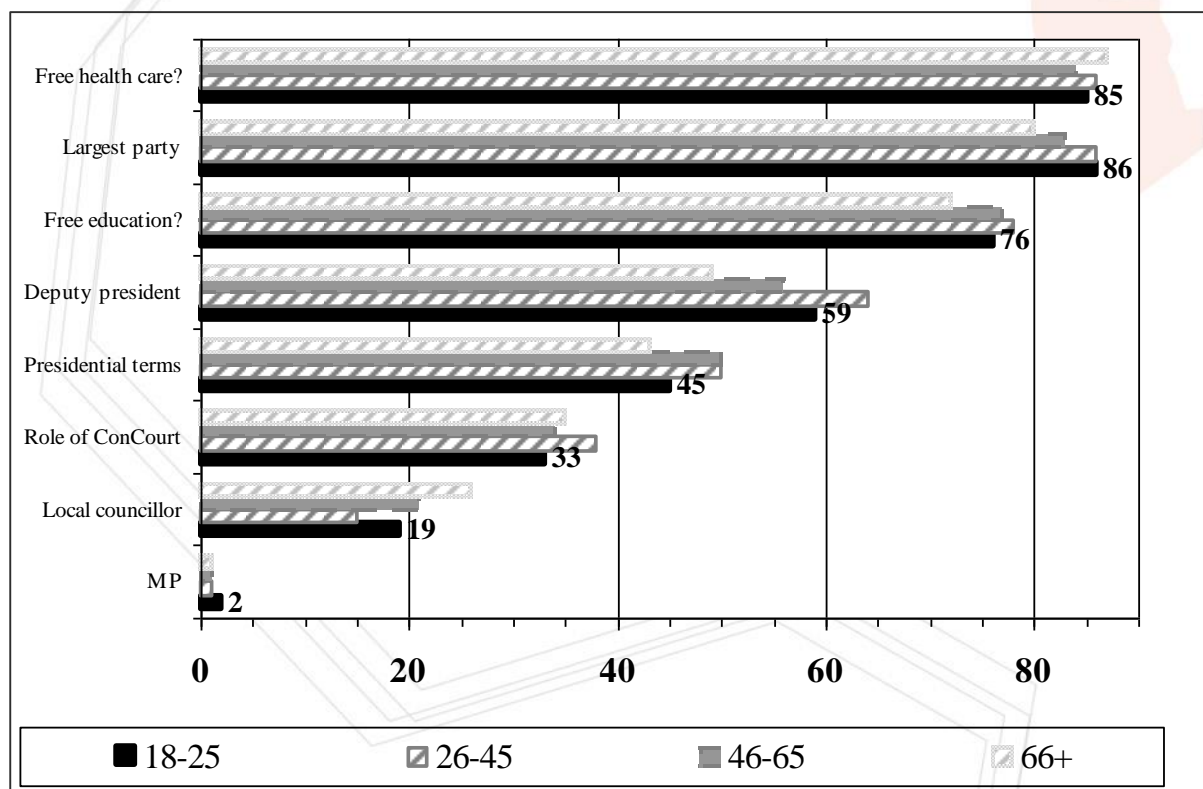
To what extent do South Africans keep informed about politics and government? As of 2011, 51% said they read newspapers at least a few times a week. Along with senior citizens (38%), youth (41%) were less likely to read newspapers than younger adults (47%) or middle-aged adults (52%). Yet these differences are not consistent across time: In 2002 and 2006, youth were actually the most likely to read newspapers frequently (Figure 5). All age groups exhibit very low levels of what political scientists call “political competence,” with only about one in five disagreeing with the statement, “Politics and government seem so complicated that you can’t really understand what’s going on.” This result has remained stable since 1997 (not shown).

Figure 5: Newspaper readership



Respondents were asked: How often do you get news from the following sources: Newspapers? (% saying “every day” or “a few times a week”)

In its 2006 survey, Afrobarometer investigated the level of South Africans' political knowledge across a wide range of dimensions. Political awareness was highest with regard to whether the government had policies about the provision of free health care (85%) and education (77%); was moderately high with regard to a series of political facts such as the identity of the largest party in Parliament (85%), the number of terms the president can serve (48%), and the role of the Constitutional Court (36%); and varied widely with regard to the identity of incumbent leaders such as the deputy president (60%), their local councillor (18%), and their designated MP (1%). But there was no clear pattern of systematically increasing or decreasing political awareness with age. Across these indicators, younger adults tended to have the highest levels of information, and senior citizens the lowest, but the differences were rarely substantively important (Figure 6).

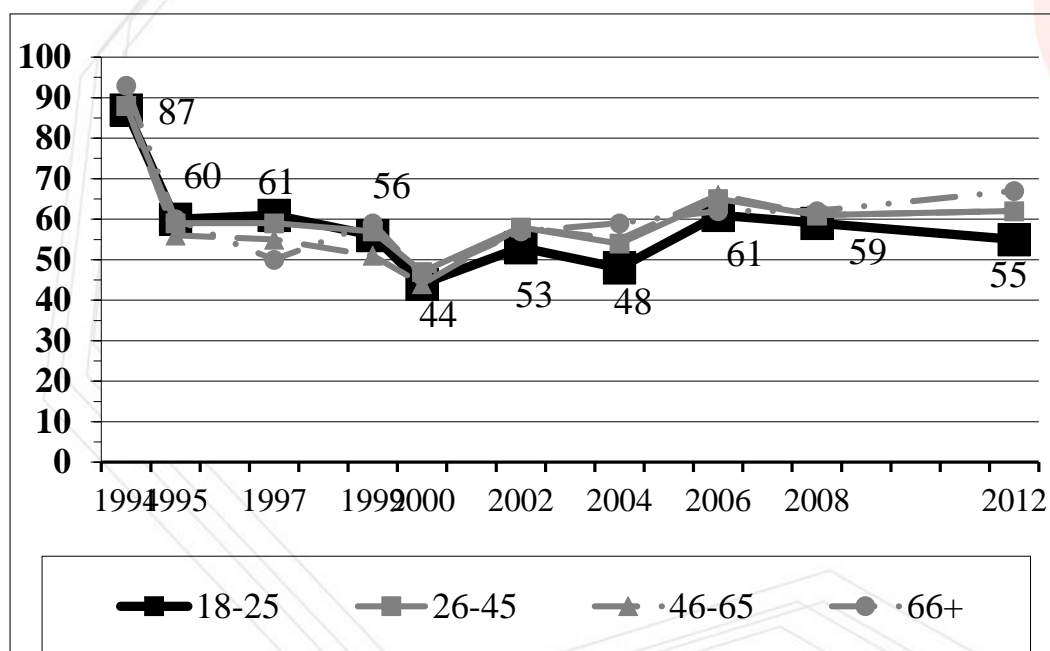
Figure 6: Political knowledge: Incumbents, facts, and policies | 2006

Respondents were asked: *Can you tell me the name of ... / Do you happen to know ... (% answering correctly)*

A clear and consistent picture emerges: Contrary to popular wisdom, there is virtually no “age profile” to democratic citizenship in South Africa. In terms of their perceptions of their role and their capacity as citizens, youth look almost identical to their older counterparts.

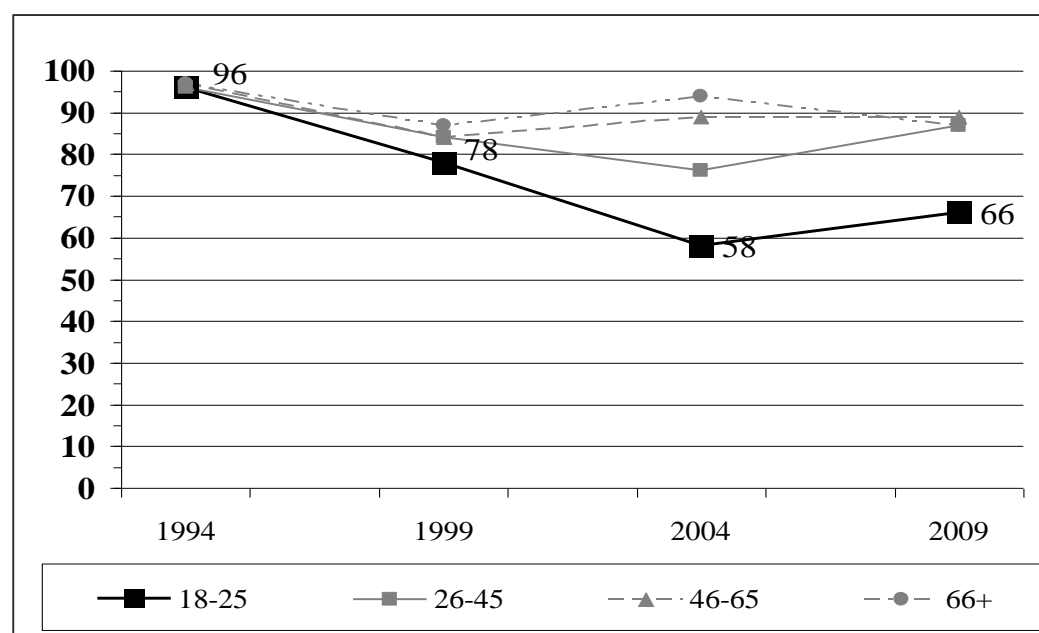
Conventional participation: Voting and campaigning

We find more meaningful age effects when it comes to actual participation. First we examine participation in elections and election campaigns. A broad indicator of people's engagement with partisan politics, and a strong predictor of their levels of electoral participation, is what political scientists call “partisan identification,” that is, whether they “feel close” to any political party. Since 2000, youth have generally been least likely to identify with a party (Figure 7). The differences, however, have been relatively small, though they increased in 2011 to 12 percentage points (with senior citizens most likely to identify with a party).

Figure 7: Partisan identification

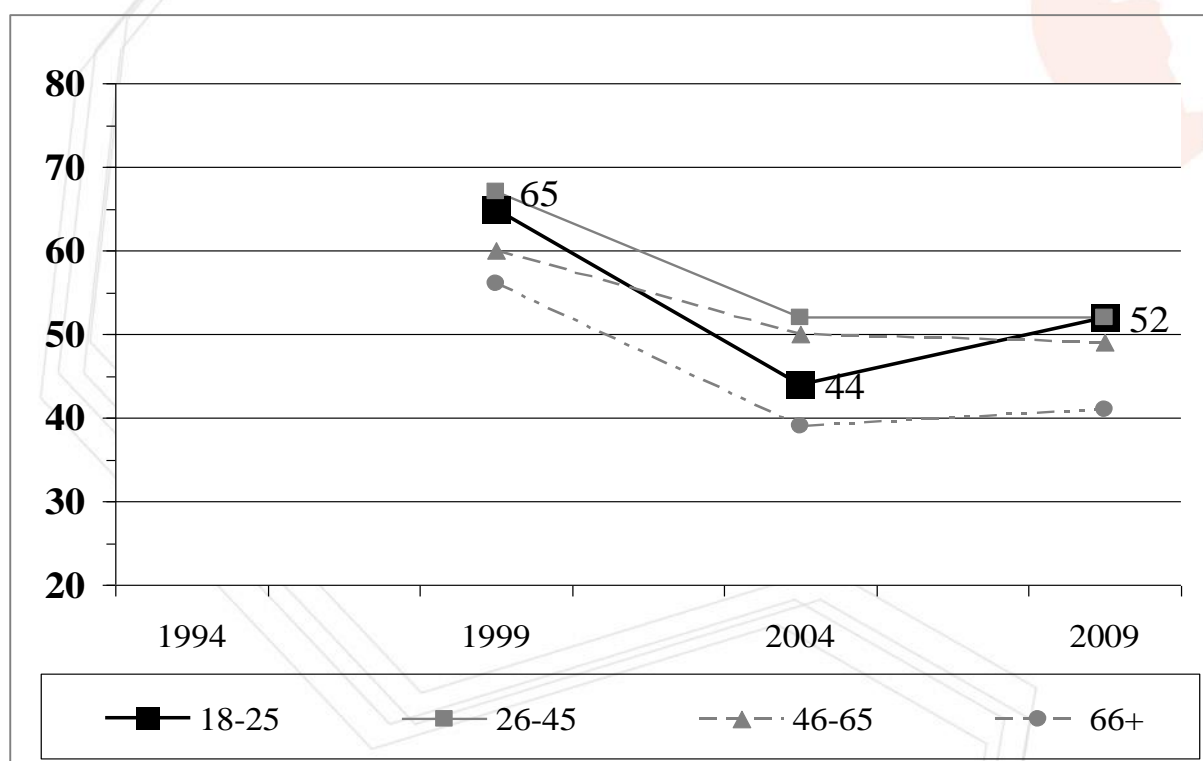
Respondents were asked: Do you feel close to any particular political party? (% saying "yes")

To examine other indicators of electoral participation, we turn to results of a series of post-election surveys known as the South African National Election Study, conducted by IDASA in 1994 and 1999 and by the University of Cape Town in 2004 and 2009. Youth were less likely than other South Africans, and have become increasingly less likely, to vote (Figure 8). This is a common finding around the world (Norris, 2002) and seems more a function of factors associated with the aging process than anything specific to South Africa. While younger voters were less likely to go to the polls in 2009, they were most likely to follow the 2009 election campaign (Figure 9) and most likely to have talked to friends or family about the election (Figure 10).

Figure 8: Voted in recent election

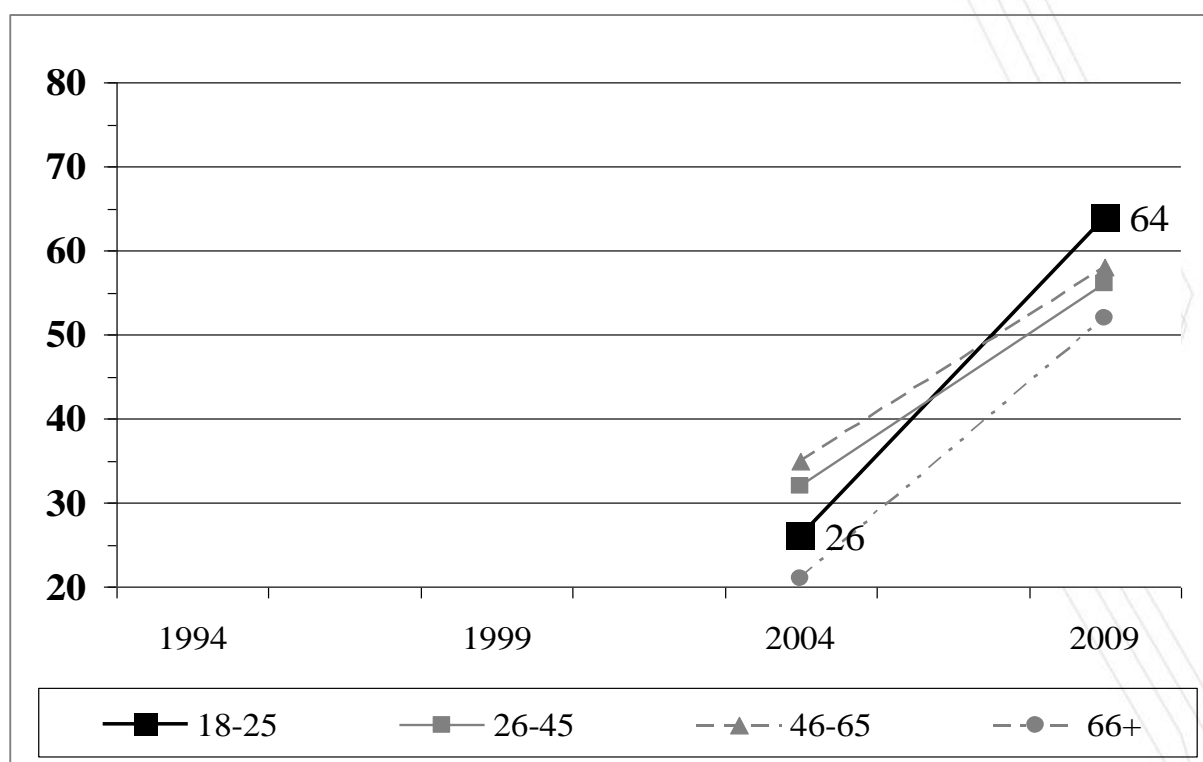
Respondents were asked: With regard to the most recent national election in [___], which statement is true for you? (% who selected "I voted")

Figure 9: Followed campaign



Respondents were asked: How closely did you follow this election campaign? (% who said "closely" or "very closely")

Figure 10: Discussed election with friends or family



Respondents were asked: How frequently did you talk about the candidates, parties or issues with your friends or family? (% who said "often" or "sometimes")

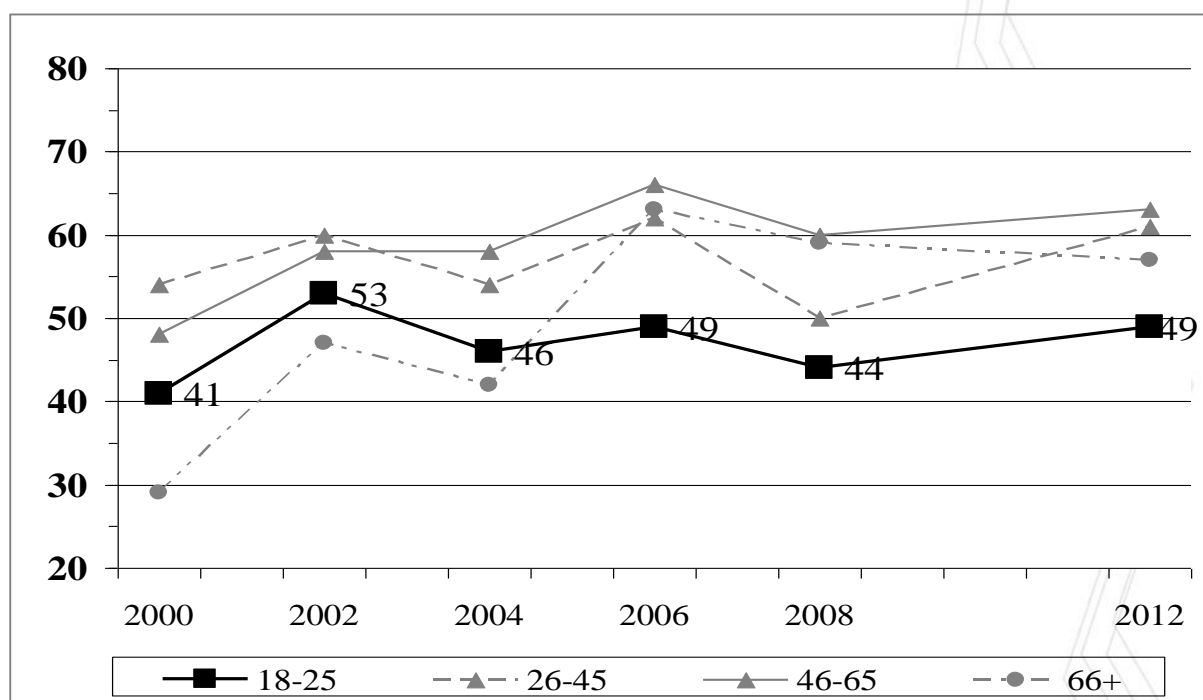
Nor are there any systematic age-related profiles to a range of other types of campaign participation (not shown), such as the proportion of people who say they were contacted by a political party during the campaign, attended an election rally, or worked for a party or a candidate during the campaign.

Conventional participation: Contacting and communing

Age-related differences in political engagement become more visible when we examine indicators of participation in conventional forms of non-electoral activity. Compared to older South Africans, youth are significantly less likely to get involved in community politics or to contact elected officials. As of 2011, 55% of all adults said they had attended a community meeting in the previous year, but youth (49%) were 14 percentage points less likely to participate than younger adults (63%) (Figure 11). And while 42% of all respondents told Afrobarometer interviewers they had joined with others to raise an issue in their community, youth (36%) were 10 percentage points less likely to do so than younger adults (46%) (Figure 12). One-fourth (27%) had contacted a local councillor in the previous year (Figure 13); middle-aged adults (31%) were almost twice as likely to do this as youth (16%). Moreover, the gap between youth and other cohorts widened significantly after 2004.

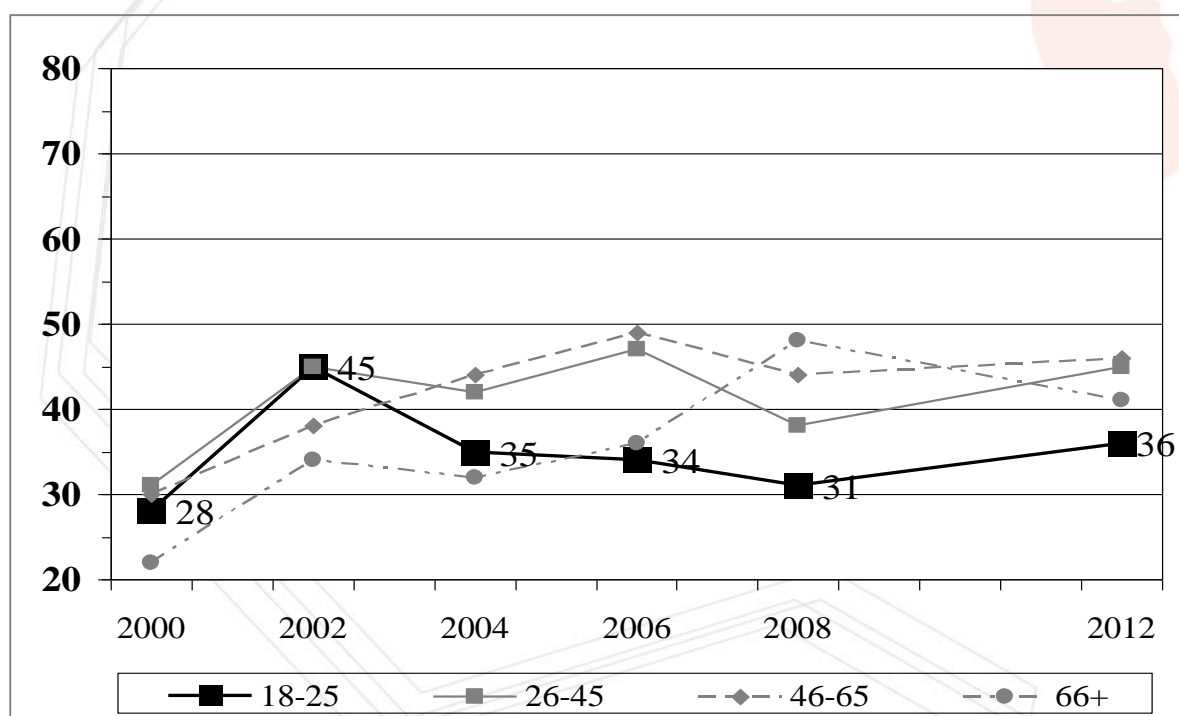
The same general pattern is evident in a set of questions asked in 2011 about local government (Figure 14). Youth were slightly less likely than other age cohorts to witness a problem with their local government and significantly less likely to discuss the problem with other community members or get together with other people to address the problem. However, the differences are small or non-existent in terms of whether they discussed the problem with community leaders or took their complaint to government officials or to the news media.

Figure 11: Attended community meetings



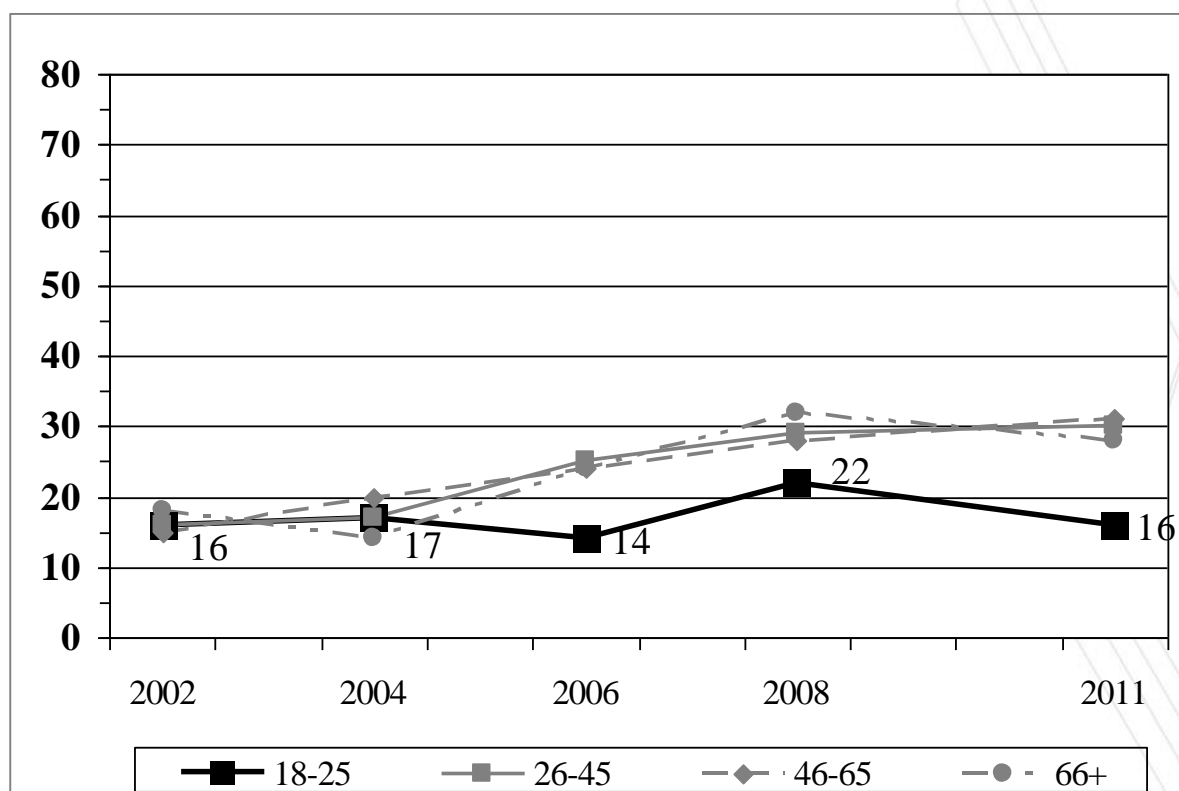
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? (% who said "yes")

Figure 12: Joined with others to raise an issue

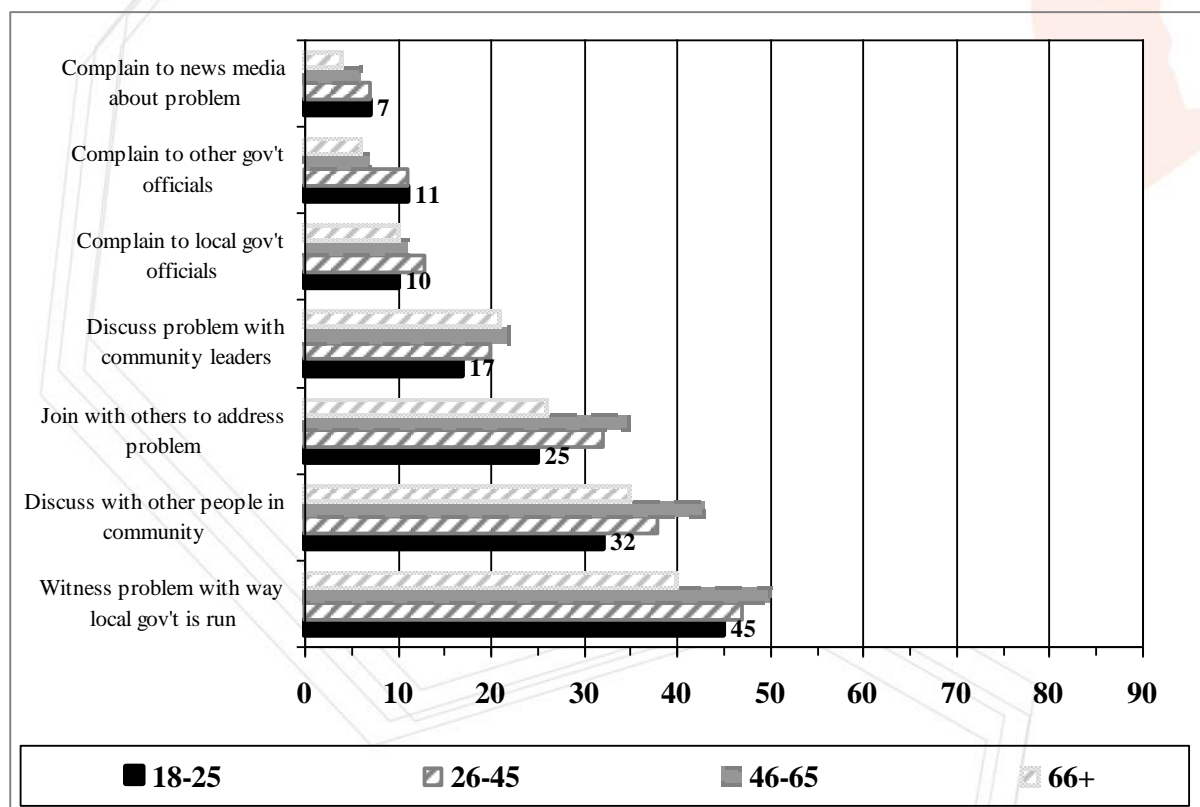


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Got together with others to raise an issue? (% who said "yes")

Figure 13: Contacted local councillor



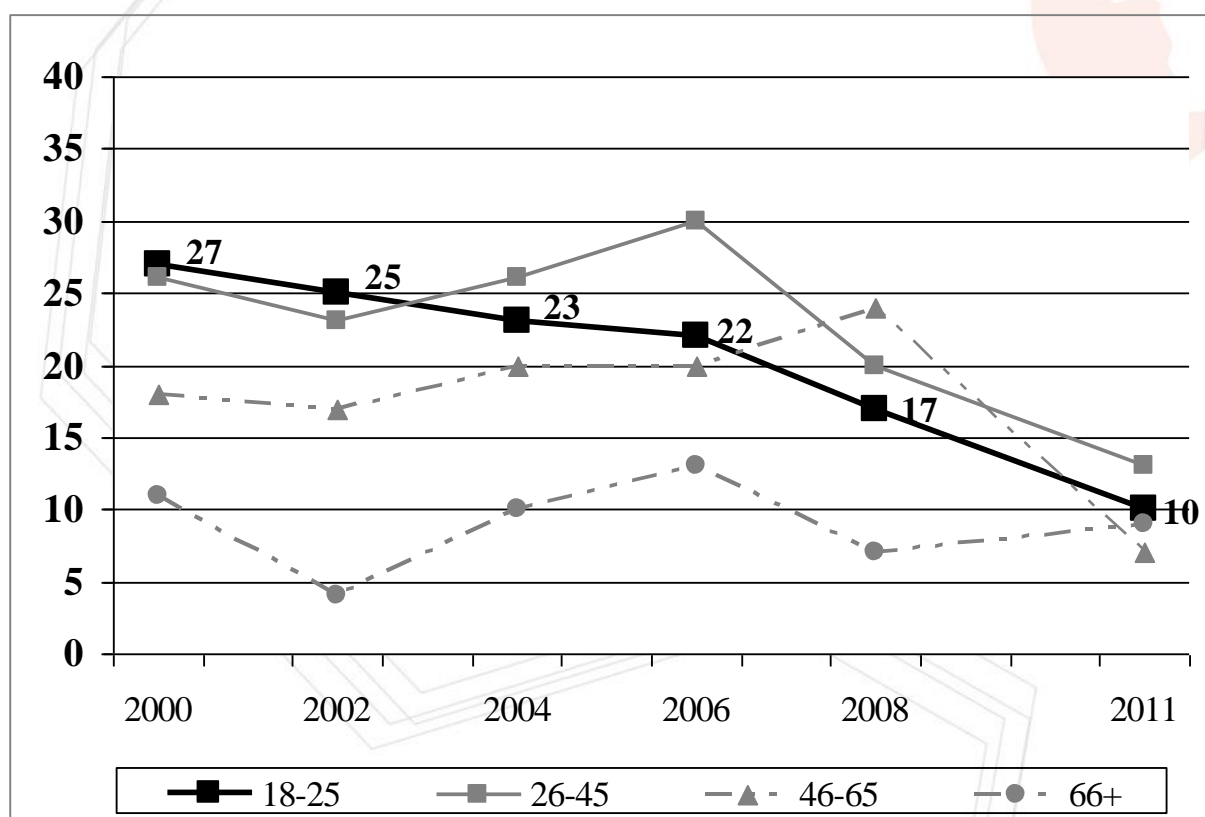
Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A local government councillor? (% who made any contact)

Figure 14: Contact with local government | 2012

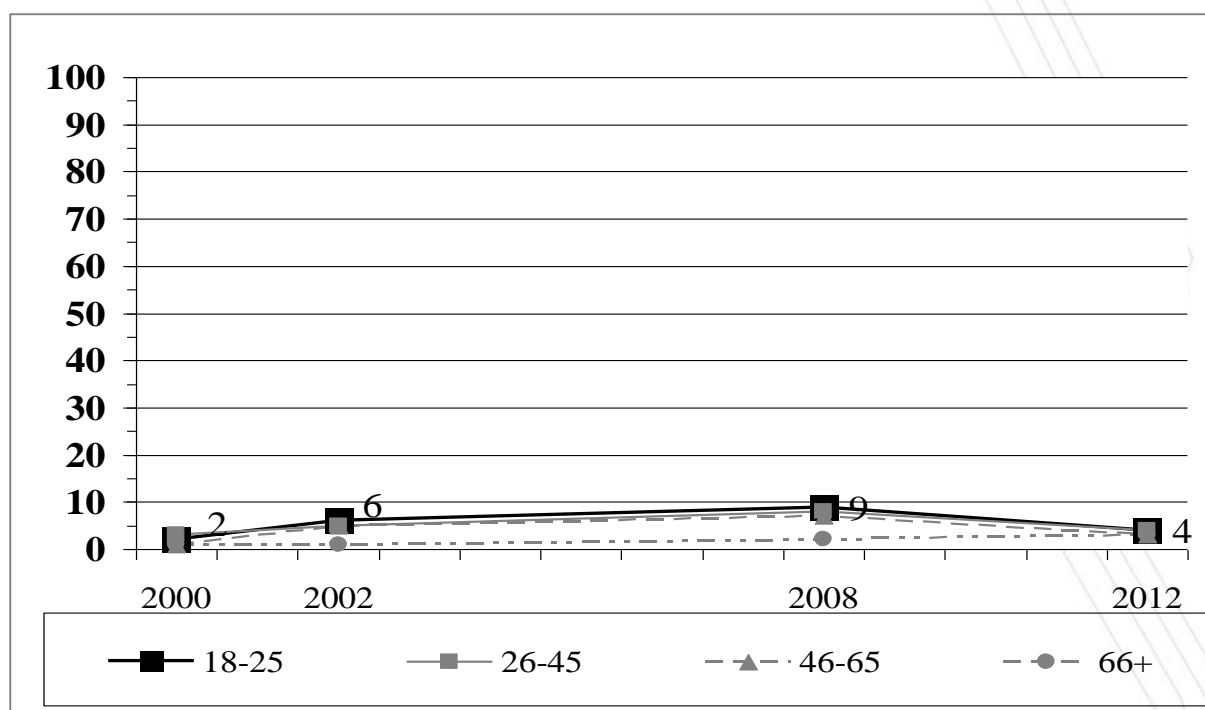
Respondents were asked: *In the past year, have you yourself seen any problems with the way local government is run? (% who said "yes") When you experienced problems with local government, which of the following steps, if any, have you taken to express your dissatisfaction? (% who said "yes")*

Unconventional participation: Protest and political violence

While the youngest South African voting-age citizens are less likely to take part in conventional forms of politics, Afrobarometer surveys have tracked relatively high rates of self-reported participation in unconventional forms, such as protest ("attending a demonstration or protest march"), although these rates show a downward trend since 2006. In contrast to the typical media depiction of township protests, protest potential has not been higher amongst youth than amongst young adults (Figure 15). Regarding political violence, 4% of respondents in 2011 told interviewers that they had "used force or violence for a political cause" at least once in the preceding year, down slightly from 2008. Again, there are no major differences between youth and other age groups (although senior citizens are consistently less likely to do use violence) (Figure 16). Moreover, the great majority of South Africans agree that "the use of violence is never justified in South African politics today," with youth respondents most likely to agree (70%) (not shown). And in responses to a different set of questions about tax morality, asked in 2011, youth respondents are no less likely to view non-payment of services as "wrong and punishable" (though they are less likely to see tax avoidance as categorically wrong) (not shown).

Figure 15: Attended protest or demonstration

Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a demonstration or protest march? (% who said "yes")

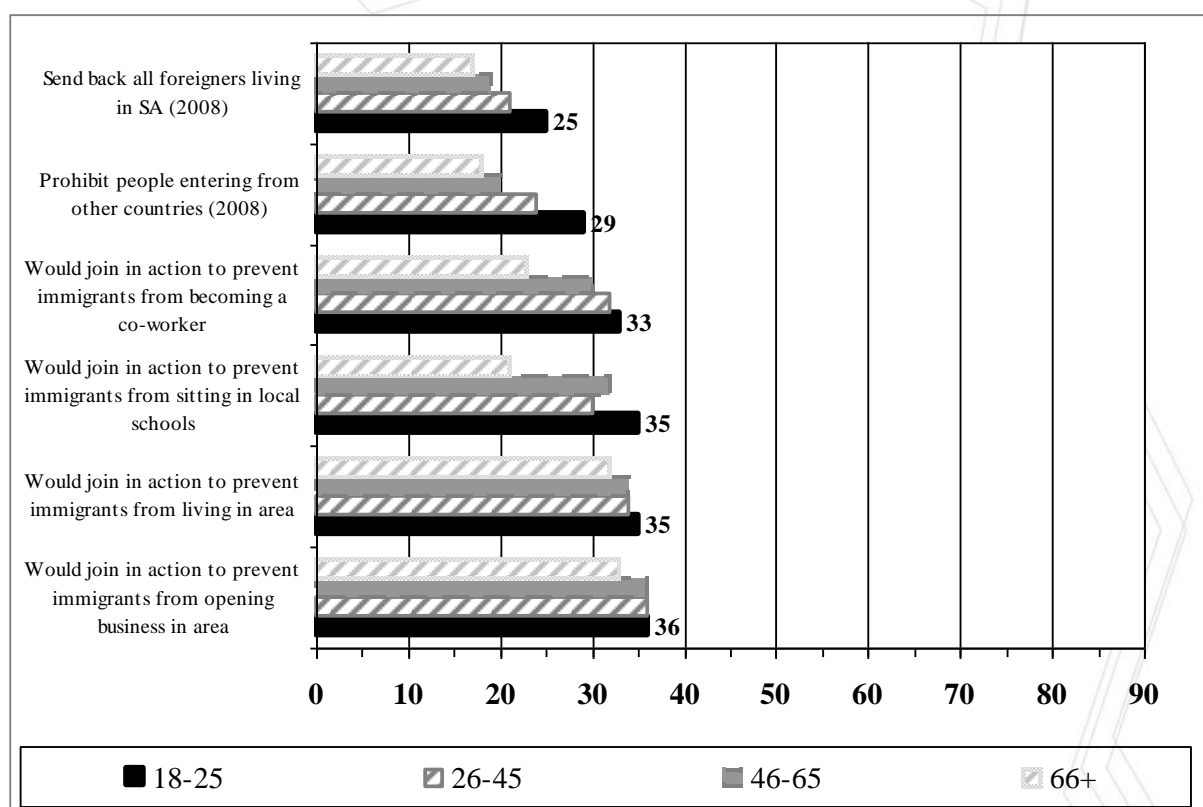
Figure 16: Used force or violence for political cause

Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Used force or violence for a political cause? (% who said "yes")

Others as political actors

What do young South Africans think about other citizens and residents? In the 2011 Afrobarometer survey, only 17% of all respondents (19% of youth) agreed that “most people can be trusted” (a widely cited dimension of social capital: see Putnam, 1993, and Norris, 2002). Afrobarometer has not measured South Africans’ levels of (in)tolerance of other people. The pre-eminent study of South Africans’ willingness to extend political rights to their least-liked political group found high levels of intolerance, but also found that age was not an important predictor (Gibson & Gouws, 2003). Given the country’s recent history, no analysis of its political culture would be complete without addressing how South Africans relate to the many legal and illegal foreign residents in the country, especially since young people featured prominently in media coverage of the wave of xenophobic violence that spread across townships in 2007. In 2008, 29% of surveyed youth favoured a prohibition on immigration into the country, and 25% supported repatriation of all foreign residents. These figures were both significantly higher than for older respondents. However, when asked about possible anti-foreigner behaviours, the approximately one-third who said they would be likely to join with others to prevent immigrants from moving into their neighbourhood (35%), operating a business in their area (36%), enrolling in local schools (35%), or becoming a co-worker (33%) is statistically indistinguishable from the responses of older cohorts (Figure 17). Thus, consistent with Gibson and Gouws’ (2003) findings about South Africans’ tolerance of their fellow citizens, South Africans exhibit high levels of intolerance toward immigrants, but it is not possible to pin this problem on the youth.

Figure 17: Policy preferences and potential intolerant actions toward foreigners



Respondents were asked: How about people from other countries who are presently living in South Africa? Who, if anyone, do you think the government should send back to their own countries? (% who said “All”)

How about people from other countries coming to South Africa? Which one of the following do you think the government should do? (% who said “Prohibit people from entering from other countries”)

How likely is it that you would take part in action to prevent people who have come here from other countries in Africa from: Becoming one of your co-workers? Moving into your neighbourhood? Operating a business in your area? Sitting in the same classroom as your children? (% who said “very likely” or “likely”)

Contextualizing youth political engagement

As we have seen, South Africa's youth are no different from their older fellow citizens in a wide range of attitudes related to citizenship. They have the same conception of the role of the citizen. They have slightly lower levels of cognitive engagement and cognitive sophistication than some other age cohorts. They are no more likely than other South Africans to hold negative views and intentions toward immigrants.

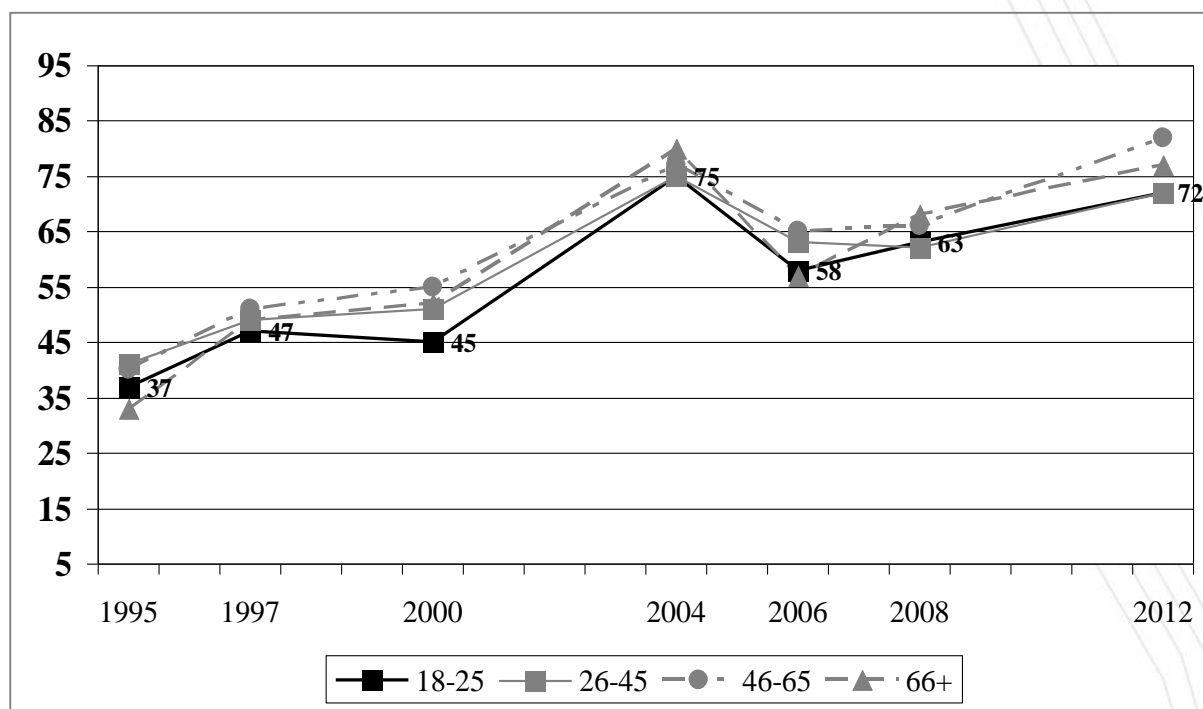
There are larger differences in terms of some indicators of physical engagement in the political process. Youth are far less likely to vote in national elections, though they are not less likely to get involved in other campaign activities, such as attending rallies, working for political parties, and following election campaigns. Between elections, youth are significantly less likely to join with others to address issues and solve problems, contact elected leaders, and become involved in community affairs and local government. But they are *not* any more likely to participate in protest action or resort to political violence.

Why are younger people less likely to become physically involved in conventional forms of democratic politics? Popular wisdom might suggest that compared to older generations they harbour systematically different values toward the new South Africa and its democratic system, are more apathetic and more alienated, possess lower levels of national identity, are less committed to the democratic process, and are less likely to see state enforcement institutions as legitimate.

Apathy and alienation

We have already seen that youth are no more apathetic, with the same levels of political interest and political discussion as other age cohorts. Are they more alienated? The longest-repeated Afrobarometer item that taps the concept of alienation is a series of questions about how frequently people believe elected leaders listen to them. Whether we ask about MPs (Figure 18) or local councillors (not shown), we see sharp increases in alienation over the past 15 years, but we also see that youth respondents are usually least likely to feel that elected leaders ignore their views.

Figure 18: Alienation: Members of Parliament don't listen to people like me

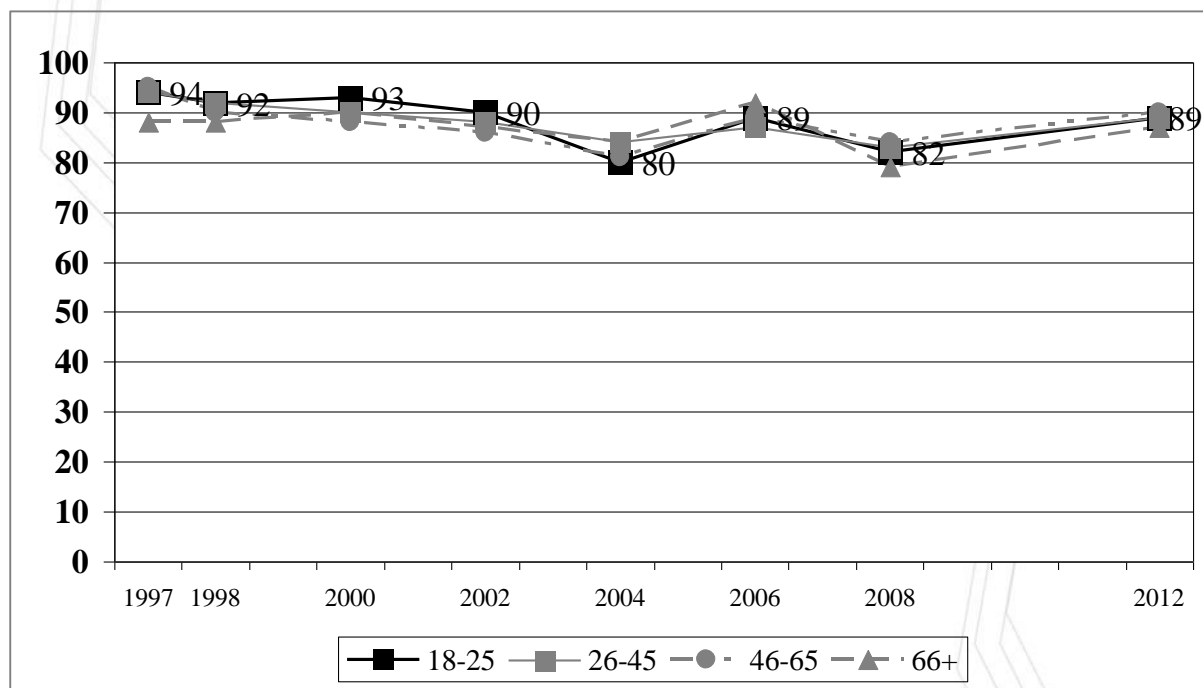


Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Members of Parliament? (% who said "never" or "only sometimes")

Political community

Does the root of low levels of youth participation lie in their rejection of the new South Africa? We find just the opposite: Young South Africans, like other age groups, exhibit very high levels of national identity (Figure 19). They are proud of being South African. They also believe that a South African identity is an important part of how they see themselves, and they want to pass that identity on to their children (not shown).

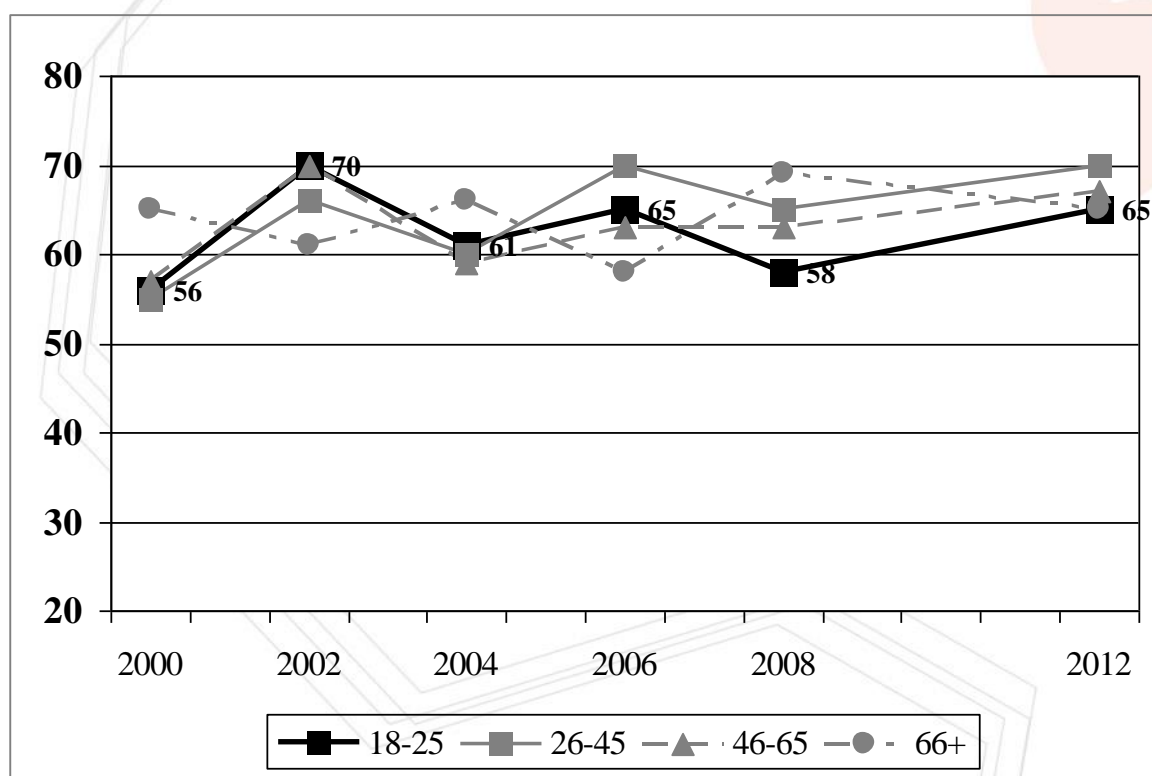
Figure 19: Pride in South African national identity



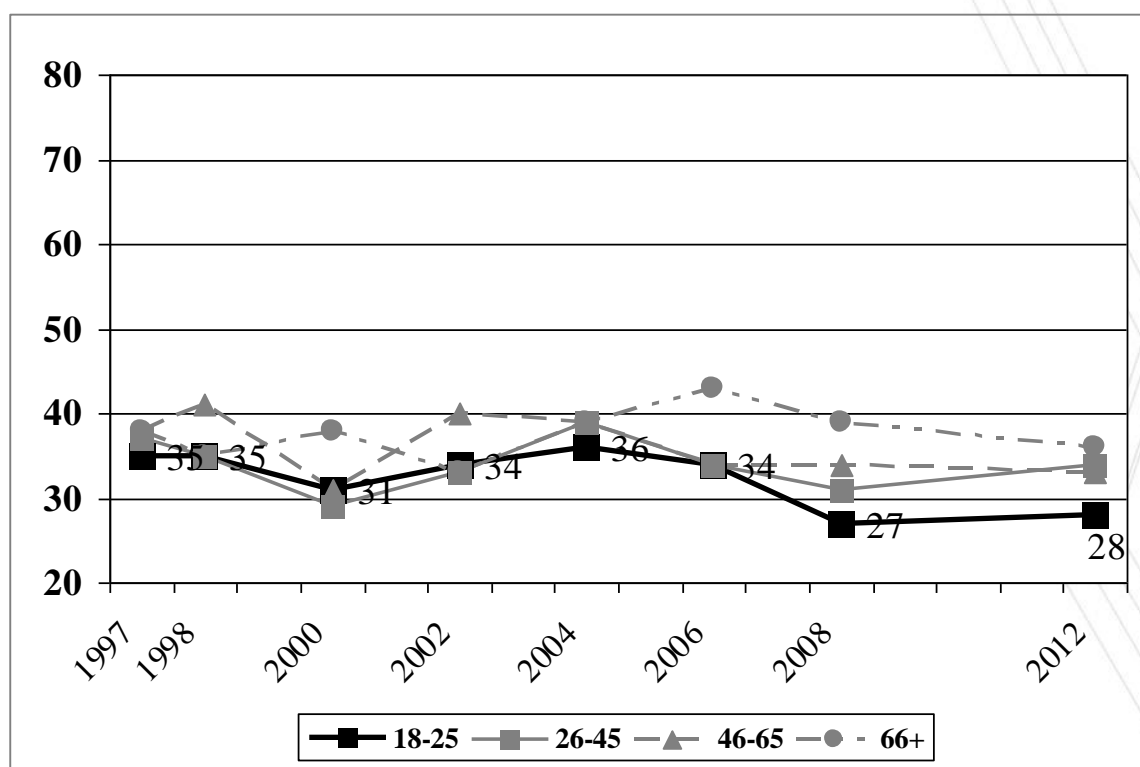
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It makes you proud to be called a South African." (% who agreed)

Democratic regime

Youth respondents are somewhat less likely than other age groups to believe that "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government" (not shown). They are also less likely to reject an alternative regime where "only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office" (Figure 20). And they are the least likely age group to be unwilling to give up regular elections and live under "a non-elected government or leader [that] could impose law and order, and deliver houses and jobs" (just 28%, 8 points lower than senior citizens) (Figure 21). Yet while these differences should not be ignored, the far more important finding is the generally weak level of support for democracy across all age groups.

Figure 20: Rejection of one-party rule

Respondents were asked: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office? (% who said "strongly disapprove" or "disapprove")

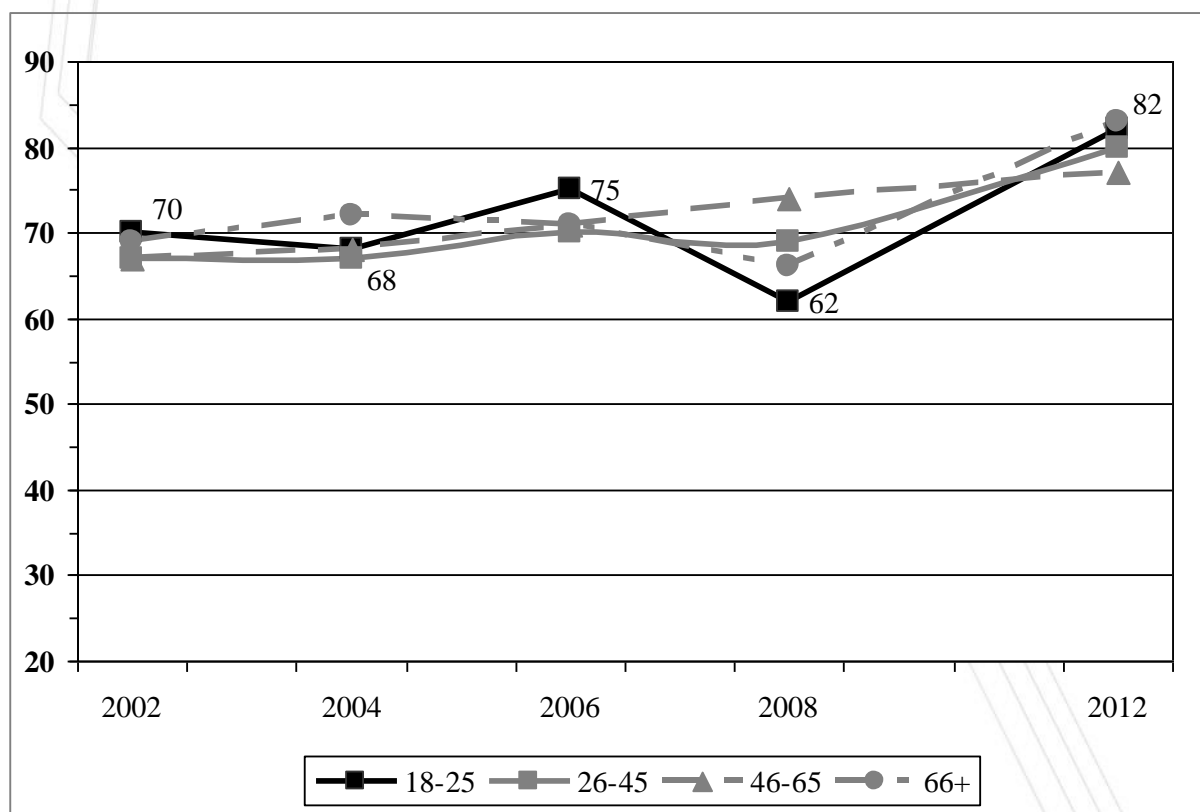
Figure 21: Unwilling to live under 'dictatorship that delivers'

Respondents were asked: If a non-elected government or leader could impose law and order, and deliver houses and jobs: How willing or unwilling would you be to give up regular elections and live under such a government? (% who said "very unwilling" or "unwilling")

State legitimacy

Finally, we examine indicators of the legitimacy of South Africa's political institutions. By legitimacy, we mean a sense of "moral ought-ness" (Eldridge, 1977), that is, the belief that the institutions, especially the enforcement institutions, of the state are appropriate and that their decisions ought to be obeyed regardless of whether one agrees with those decisions (Easton, 1965). Young South Africans are no less likely than other citizens to support the authority of the courts (Figure 22) and the police (not shown).

Figure 22: Courts have the right to make binding decisions



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: "The courts have the right to make decisions that people always have to abide by." (% who said "strongly agree" or "agree")

Youth and drivers of political participation

While we have seen that young South Africans participate at roughly the same rate as older people, do they participate for the same reasons? To answer this question, we used the Afrobarometer South Africa 2008 data set and ran a series of regressions testing the extent to which a number of individual-level characteristics, values, and attitudes predict or explain respondents' participation in various activities. Using the same set of predictor variables, we tested three models of *communing* (which is an average index of the frequency with which people attend local meetings and join with others to address community issues), *contacting* (an average index of the frequency with which people contact MPs, government officials, and local councillors), and *protesting* (an average index of the frequency with which people attend protest demonstrations and take part in political violence).

As predictor variables, we used many of the factors reviewed in this paper but also added other important issues that can be grouped into three larger conceptual categories. First, we examined a number of demographic issues such as age (18-25 years old), race (black), gender (male), place of residence (urban), employment, lived poverty (the frequency with

which people go without basic necessities), *partisanship* (ANC), and *membership in a community group*. Second, we tested the effect of various aspects of cognitive sophistication, including *formal education*, *news media use*, *cognitive engagement* (an average index of political interest and political discussion), and *internal efficacy* (an index of whether people feel able to get together with others to make MPs and local councillors listen to them). Third, we tested a series of values relevant to the new South Africa, such as *national identity*, *demand for democracy*, *state legitimacy*, and whether people believe that *citizens should hold leaders accountable*, *citizens should be critical*, and *citizens should tell their leaders what to do*.

Beyond these main effects, we also wanted to know whether there were any interaction effects, that is, whether any of these factors have different effects amongst youth than amongst other age groups. For example, while we might uncover effects of being young and of being poor, we also would want to know whether the effect of being poor differs amongst young people compared to older people.

The results, displayed in the first column of Table 1, indicate that these predictors, when combined, provide a solid explanation of *communing* (adjusted $R^2 = .185$). Across all respondents, the strongest driver of community participation is membership in a community group (Beta, the standardized regression coefficient, $= .285$), followed by youth ($B = .237$), cognitive engagement ($.167$), being black ($.144$), and demand for democracy ($.094$). Thus, while we previously saw that youth had lower rates than other South Africans of attending community meetings or joining in issue groups, once we take into account the simultaneous effect of other factors, being young is actually a strong positive predictor of community participation. One reason is that, because they are less likely to be integrated into their communities, young people are less likely to belong to community organizations. But another reason is the peculiar effect of two factors amongst youth. While cognitive engagement in general increases the likelihood of community participation, it reduces it amongst those aged 18-25. And while national identity has no effect in general, younger people with strong attachments to South Africa are less likely to participate.

We are also able to construct a solid model of *contacting* (adjusted $R^2 = .176$), as shown in the second column of Table 1. The strongest predictor, again, is membership in a community group ($B = .270$), followed by a sense of internal efficacy ($.145$), being black ($.118$), cognitive engagement ($.094$), and newspaper readership ($.057$). In addition, there is one important interaction effect: While neither being young nor demand for democracy has any general effect, young South Africans who are committed to democracy are significantly less likely to contact government officials or elected representatives.

These variables provide a much less effective set of predictors of participation in violent protest, explaining just 6.2% of the variance. Again, the most important driver is membership in a community group ($B = .146$), followed by cognitive engagement ($.092$), being black ($.068$), and being male ($.059$). Two values also play important roles. Those people who demand democracy ($-.061$) and those who see the country's law enforcement institutions as legitimate ($-.052$) are less likely to take part in violent protest. Finally, there are two important interaction effects of age. While community group membership increases protest in general, young people who belong to a group are even more likely to take part in violent protest. And while feelings of national identity have no general effect, young people with a strong sense of patriotism are less likely to protest.

Table 1: Predictors of communing, contacting, and protesting

	Communing^a	Contacting^b	Protesting^c
Demographics			
Youth (aged 18-25)	.237***	--	--
Gender (male)	.065***	--	.059**
Race (black)	.144***	.118***	.068***
Lived poverty	.083***	.050*	--
Member of community group	.285***	.270***	.146***
Cognitive sophistication			
Newspaper readership	--	.057**	--
Cognitive engagement	.167***	.094***	.092***
Internal efficacy	.057**	.145***	--
Values			
National identity	--	--	NS
Demand for democracy	.094***	--	-.061**
State legitimacy	--	--	-.052*
Voters should hold leaders accountable	.057**	.046*	--
Interactions			
Youth X Member of community group		--	.064**
Youth X Cognitive engagement	-.102**		
Youth X National identity	-.188**	--	-.150*
Youth X Demand for democracy	--	-.138*	--
Multiple r	.434	.423	.257
Adjusted R ²	.185	.176	.062

^a Average construct of the frequency with which people attend community meetings and join with others to address community issues

^b Average construct of the frequency with which people contact MPs, government officials, local councillors

^c Average construct of the frequency with which people attend demonstrations and take part in political violence

Cells display standardized (Beta) regression coefficients. Significant at *p<0.05 level, **p<0.01 level, ***p<0.001 level.

Source: 2008 Afrobarometer South Africa survey.



Conclusion

This brief review of key dimensions of South Africa's political culture indicates that there are real problems with citizenship in the country. At the same time, it clearly shows that these problems are not peculiar to young people. Across a range of indicators, we have consistently seen that there is no or only a minor age profile to South African political culture.

On one hand, the fact that the youth are not "worse" than their elders might reassure those who find themselves in a "moral panic" about the state of the youth. On the other hand, this finding should be cause for concern given that the youth have reached political maturity in a free and democratic political system and have been educated by a new school curriculum that claims to have democratic citizenship as one of its key outcomes.

But the reality of post-apartheid South Africa is that while a new generation has come of age with freedoms of which their parents could only have dreamt, all South Africans now confront a "thin" form of democracy in which, with the exception of local ward councillors, no putatively elected representatives at the provincial or national level are actually elected by the voters but rather are selected by party officials. By producing disincentives for elected officials to learn too much about the needs and policy preferences of the voters, lest those opinions lead them into conflict with their party leaders, it also teaches citizens that active engagement with elected officials is not a rational use of scarce time or resources.

While South Africa has experienced substantial growth over the past decade, increasing the wealth of one-fifth of all black South Africans and moving one in 10 into the middle class, enduring unemployment and poverty mean that the children of the bottom two-fifths of households now grow up under worse material conditions than their parents (Leibbrandt, Poswell, Naidoo, & Welch, 2006; Leibbrandt & Levinsohn, 2011).

And while there has been a drive toward universal education, with a curriculum designed to produce more engaged citizens, the intended values to be taught were so implicit in the new curriculum that poorly trained teachers in increasingly dysfunctional schools have struggled to produce any substantial changes in the belief systems of an ever-expanding generation of "Born Frees."

References

- Almond, G., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bratton, M. & Mattes, R. (2001). Support for democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or instrumental? *British Journal of Political Science*, 31(3), 447-474.
- Bratton, M., Mattes, R., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2005). *Public opinion, democracy and market reform in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauer, N. (2011). Youth leagues in SA: A poverty of options. Mail & Guardian. 1 September. Available: <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-01-youth-leagues-in-sa-a-poverty-of-options> [May 2013].
- Dalton, R. (2008). *Citizen politics in advanced industrial democracies*, 5th ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. New York: Wiley.
- Eckstein, H. (1966). *Division and cohesion in democracy: A study of Norway*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Eckstein, H. (1969). Authority relations and governmental performance. *Comparative Political Studies*, 2, 269-232.
- Eldridge, A. F. (1977). *Legislatures in plural societies: The search for cohesion in national development*. Vol. 5. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Glenn, I. & Mattes, R. (2012). Political communication in post-apartheid South Africa. In Semetko, H., & Scammell, M, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Political Communication*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gibson, J., & Gouws, A. (2003). *Overcoming intolerance in South Africa: Experiments in democratic persuasion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leibbrandt, M. & Levinsohn, J. (2011). Fifteen years on: Household income in South Africa. NBER Working Papers Series w16661.
- Leibbrandt, M., Poswell, L., Naidoo, P., & Welch, M. (2006). Measuring recent changes in South African inequality and poverty using 1996 and 2001 census data. In Bhorat, H., ed., *Poverty and Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Mattes, R. (2001). Democracy without the people: Institutions, economics and public opinion in South Africa. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(1), 22-36.
- Mattes, R. (2002). Uniquely African? In Burgess, S., ed., *SA Tribes: Who We Are, How We Live, and What We Want From Life in South Africa* (pp. 82-97). Cape Town: David Philip.
- Mattes, R. (2008). South Africans' participation in local politics and government. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 66/67, 116-141.
- Mattes, R. (2011a). Elections: 1994 to 2009. In Jacobs, S., & Johnson, K., eds., *Encyclopaedia of South Africa* (pp. 111-118). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Mattes, R. (2011b). Forging democrats: A partial success story. In Shapiro, I., & Tabeau, K., eds., *After Apartheid: Reinventing South Africa?* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Mattes, R. (2012). The 'born frees': The prospects for generational change in post-apartheid South Africa. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), 133-153.
- Mattes, R. & Bratton, M. (2007). Learning about democracy in Africa: Performance, awareness and experience. *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(1), 192-217.
- Mattes, R., Taylor, D., McDonald, D., Poore, A., & Richmond, W. (2000). South African attitudes to immigrants and immigration. In McDonald, D., ed., *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Mattes, R. & Thiel, H. (1998). Consolidation and public opinion in South Africa. *Journal of Democracy*, 9(1), 95-110.

- Norris, P, ed. (1998). *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic phoenix: Reinventing democratic activism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, R. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schreiner, W. & Mattes, R. (2012). The possibilities of election campaigns as sites of political advocacy: South Africa in comparative perspective. In Thuynsma, H., ed., *Public Opinion and Interest Group Politics: South Africa's Missing Links?* Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.
- Seekings, J. (1996). The 'lost generation': South Africa's youth problem in the early 1990s. *Transformation*, 29, 103-125.

Recent Afrobarometer working papers



- No. 151 Mattes, Robert. South Africa's emerging black middle class: A harbinger of political change? 2014
- No. 150 Cheeseman, Nic. Does the African middle class defend democracy? Evidence from Kenya. 2014
- No. 149 Schaub, Max. Solidarity with a sharp edge: Communal conflict and local collective action in rural Nigeria. 2014
- No.148 Peiffer, Caryn & Richard Rose. Why do some Africans pay bribes while other Africans don't? 2014
- No.147 Ellis, Erin. A vote of confidence: Retrospective voting in Africa. 2014
- No.146 Hollard, Guillaume & Omar Sene. What drives quality of schools in Africa? Disentangling social capital and ethnic divisions. 2014
- No.145 Dionne, Kim Yi, Kris L. Inman, & Gabriella R. Montinola. Another resource curse? The impact of remittances on political participation. 2014
- No.144 Carlson, Elizabeth. Social desirability bias and reported vote preferences in Africa surveys. 2014
- No.143 Ali, Merima, Odd-Helge Fjeldstad, & Ingrid Hoem Sjursen. To pay or not to pay? Citizens' attitudes towards taxation in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa. 2013
- No.142 Bodenstein, Thilo. Ethnicity and individual attitudes towards international investors: Survey evidence from sub-Saharan Africa. 2013
- No.141 Bandyopadhyay, Sanghamitra & Elliott Green. Pre-colonial political centralization and contemporary development in Uganda. 2012
- No.140 Sacks, Audrey. Can donors and non-state actors undermine citizens' legitimating beliefs. 2012
- No.139 Justesen, Mogens K. & Christian Bjørnskov. Exploiting the poor: Bureaucratic corruption and poverty in Africa. 2012
- No.138 De Luca, Giacomo & Marijke Verpoorten. From vice to virtue? Civil war and social capital in Uganda. 2012
- No.137 Kerr, Nicholas. Perceptions versus reality: Assessing popular evaluations of electoral quality in Africa. 2011
- No.136 Resnick, Danielle & Daniela Casale. Political participation of Africa's youth: Turnout, partisanship, and protest. 2011
- No.135 Conroy-Krutz, Jeffrey & Carolyn Logan. Museveni and the 2011 Ugandan election: Did the money atter? 2011
- No.134 Carter, Danielle. Sources of state legitimacy in contemporary South Africa: A theory of political goods. 2011
- No.133 Justesen, Mogens K. Too poor to care? The salience of AIDS in Africa. 2011
- No.132 Kasara, Kimuli. Separate and suspicious: Local social and political context and ethnic tolerance in Kenya. 2011
- No.131 Mattes, Robert. The 'Born Frees': The prospects for generational change in post-apartheid South Africa. 2011
- No.130 Baldwin, Kate. When politicians cede control of resources: Land, chiefs and coalition-building in Africa. 2011
- No.129 Conroy-Krutz, Jeffrey & Dominique Lewis. Mapping ideologies in African landscapes. 2011
- No.128 Logan, Carolyn. The roots of resilience: Exploring popular support for African traditional authorities. 2011
- No.127 Bratton, Michael, Ravi Bhavnani & Tse-Hsin Chen. Voting intentions in Africa: Ethnic, economic or partisan? 2011
- No.126 D'Arcy, Michelle. Why do citizens assent to pay tax? Legitimacy, taxation and the African state. 2011

Afrobarometer Working Papers Series

Editor: Michael Bratton, mbratton@msu.edu

Editorial Board: E. Gyimah-Boadi, Carolyn Logan, Robert Mattes, Leonard Wantchekon

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Afrobarometer publications report the results of national sample surveys on the attitudes of citizens in selected African countries toward democracy, markets, civil society, and other aspects of development. Publications are simultaneously co-published by the six Afrobarometer core partner and support unit institutions. All publications can be searched and downloaded from our website at www.afrobarometer.org.

Support for Afrobarometer is provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

Core partners:

Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana)

95 Nortei Ababio Street, North Airport Residential Area
P.O. Box LG 404, Legon-Accra, Ghana
Tel: +233 21 776 142
Fax: +233 21 763 028
www.cddghana.org

Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi

P.O. Box 30197
Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 2247968
Fax: +254 20 2222036
www.ids.uonbi.ac.ke

Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP)

Arconville, Lot 104 - Parcelle J, 02 BP 372
Cotonou, République du Benin
Tel: +229 21 363 873/ 229 94 940 108
Fax: +229 21 362 029
www.ireep.org

Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa (IJR)

P.O. Box 18094, Wynberg 7824
Cape Town, South Africa
Tel: +27 21 763 7128
Fax: +27 21 763 7138
www.ijr.org.za

Support units:

Michigan State University (MSU)

Department of Political Science
East Lansing, MI 48824
Tel: +1 517 353 6590
Fax: +1 517 432 1091
www.polisci.msu.edu

University of Cape Town (UCT)

Democracy in Africa Research Unit
Centre for Social Science Research
Private Bag Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Tel: +27 21 650 3827 | Dept: +27 21 650 3811
Fax: +27 21 650 4657
www.cssr.uct.org.za

