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South Africa's Youth and Political Participation, 1994-2014

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South Africa's Youth and Political Participation, 1994-2014

Abstract

South Africans hold – often simultaneously – contradictory beliefs about young people and politics. On one hand, driven largely by a romanticized memory of Soweto and the street battles of the 1980s, many people see the youth as the primary catalyst of activism and political change. On the other hand, driven by continuing media depictions of youth unemployment, township protests and the antics of the ANC Youth League, a wide range of commentators routinely experience “moral panics” about the apparent “crisis” of the youth and their corrosive effect on the country’s political culture. In this report, we review a wide range of longitudinal survey data spanning the first two decades of democracy and find that there are indeed a series of real problems with South Africa’s political culture, particularly in the area of citizenship. At the same time, these data clearly show that these problems are largely not peculiar to young people. Across a range of different indicators, we find consistently that there are no, or relatively minor, age profiles to most dimensions of South African political culture.

Introduction

It has now been almost forty years since the Soweto uprisings. Ever since that watershed moment, sparked and driven by rebellion amongst black high school students, South Africans have held – often simultaneously – contradictory beliefs about young people and politics. On one hand, driven largely by a romanticized memory of Soweto and the street battles of the 1980s, many people see the youth as the primary catalyst of activism and political change. In this vein, 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 continuing media depictions of youth unemployment, township protests and the antics of the ANC Youth League (often with titles such as “Youth Unemployment: South Africa’s Ticking Bomb” (Bauer, 2011)), or “Our Youth Must Stop Protesting and Start Studying” (Hweshe, 2012), often accompanied by visual images of burning tires, scattered garbage, blockaded roads, stone throwing, and destroyed private and public property, a wide range

of commentators routinely experience “moral panics” about the apparent “crisis” of the youth and their corrosive effect on the country’s political culture (for a review of the same phenomenon during the 1990s, see Seekings, 1996).

Yet these images often endure in the face of contrary, systematic evidence. 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 various forms of qualitative research with small, unrepresentative samples of individuals in the Durban and broader KwaZulu Natal areas. In a somewhat similar fashion, the African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy based 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 various forms of qualitative methodologies with small, unrepresentative samples of individuals in the Cape Town and broader Western Cape.

In this report, however, we review a wide range of longitudinal survey data spanning the first two decades of democracy and find that there are indeed a series of real problems with South Africa’s political culture, particularly in the area of citizenship. At the same time, these data clearly show that these problems are largely *not* peculiar to young people. Across a range of different indicators, we find consistently that there are no, or relatively 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 had come of age politically since the passage of the 1996 Constitution), concluded, “Rather 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 the issues of how to measure and classify a given 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 and 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 and Verba, 1963; Easton, 1965; Norris, 1998). First of all, 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 onto their children? Second, what do people believe about the existing *political regime*? Do, in other words, 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, and finally, the study of political culture focuses on *citizenship*. How do South Africans understand their *role as citizens, both in relation to the state as well as toward other people*? Do South Africans see themselves as efficacious, and are they engaged with the political process? And are they willing to extend relevant rights to those who are different to them in terms of political persuasion, race, ethnicity, or national citizenship. It is this last dimension of political culture to which we turn our primary attention in this report, 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 onto their children (Mattes, 2002; Bratton *et al.* 2005). When it comes to the *political regime*, however, South Africans pay minimal lip service to the idea of democracy (at least when 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, erringly, that those regimes are consistent with democracy (Mattes and Thiel, 1998; Mattes, 2001; Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Bratton *et al.* 2005; Mattes and Bratton, 2007). At the same time, South

Africans display relatively high levels of acceptance of the legitimacy of the country's *political institutions*, especially the 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 thirty 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 and Mattes, 2012; Schreiner and Mattes, 2012). And between elections, public contact with members of parliament 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 and 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 and Gouws, 2003). And they also exhibit the highest levels of xenophobia measured anywhere in the world (Mattes *et al.*, 2000; for a recent and comprehensive review of this evidence, see Mattes, 2011b).

Given this brief overview, the question that now confronts us 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, the common wisdom would lean decidedly 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, yet also seen to be disproportionately more likely to engage in protest and political violence. The usual reasons for this are assumed to be that young people are either apathetic, or alienated from the political process, or that they have internalized values that radically reject the new, democratic South Africa.

The evidentiary bases for our analysis will consist of a longitudinal series of surveys of the country's political culture carried out initially by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) (1994 to 1998) and subsequently by Afrobarometer (2000 to 2012). Each survey consisted of personal interviews

with random, stratified, nationally representative area probability samples. In each case, interviews were conducted face-to-face, in the language of the respondents' choice. Sample sizes were generally 2,400, which would provide national results with a confidence interval of +/- 2 percentage points, 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 (see for example www.social.un.org). What we term "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 the extent to which this varies by age. Second, we assess South Africans' levels of what political scientists call "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 actual levels of political engagement. Political scientists have found that political participation consists of discrete dimensions which are not necessarily cumulative. That is, people who participate in what might appear to be the most 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, 2013). First of all, some people tend to focus on "conventional" forms of participation, specializing in for example, voting, campaigning; contacting elected representatives or government officials; or more "communal" forms of participation such as attending community meetings or joining together with others to solve local issues. Others tend to focus on what Dalton calls "unconventional" dimensions, specializing in things like 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 seem to understand that democratic citizenship entails popular control over government, and the necessity of criticism. As of 2012, six-in-ten South Africans (61 percent) chose 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”). In a response to a question last asked in 2008, six-in-ten (60 percent) also agree 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”). However, South Africans are far less likely to see it as their responsibility to hold elected officials to account. Just one in five people answer “the voters,” when asked: “Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected” local councillors (21 percent) or members of parliament (15 percent) “do their jobs.” Most assign this task to “the party” or “the President.”

However, we see virtually no age related differences in the responses to these three questions. There was absolutely no difference in the belief that people are the bosses of government (Figure 1), and virtually no difference across the youngest three age cohorts, with a slightly higher response amongst senior citizens (66 percent) to the question about criticizing leaders (Figure 2). Finally, there were no significant age differences in terms of people’s sense of who should hold local councillors to account (Figure 3).

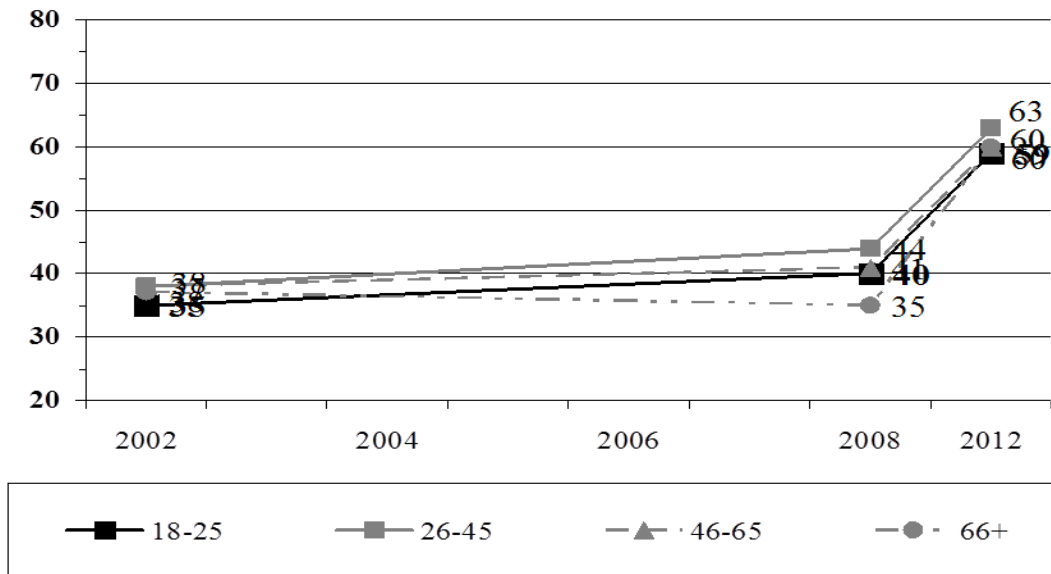


Figure 1. Citizens Should Control Government

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

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

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

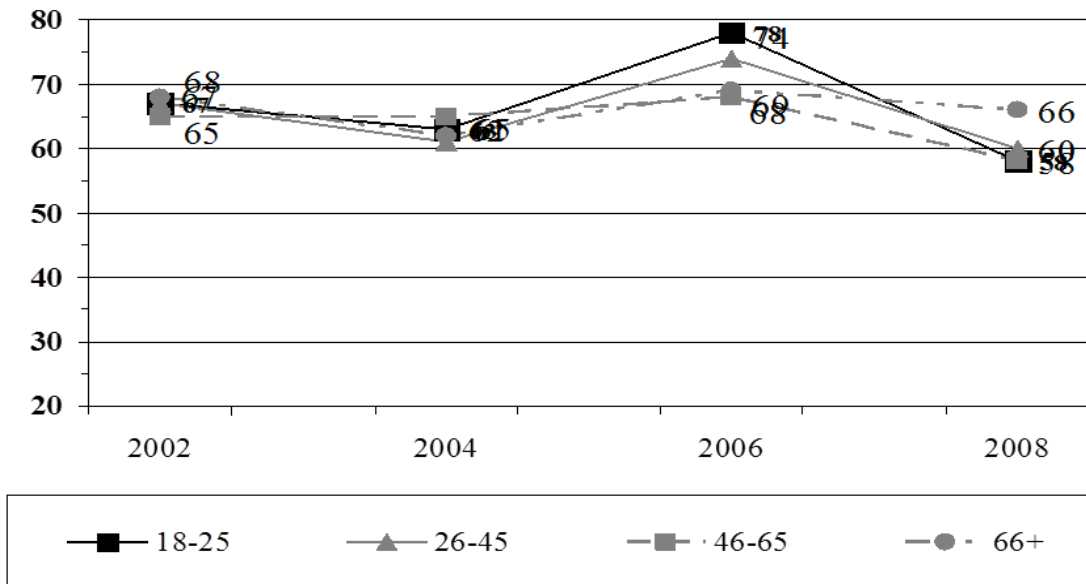


Figure 2. Citizens Should Question Leaders

Note: 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 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.

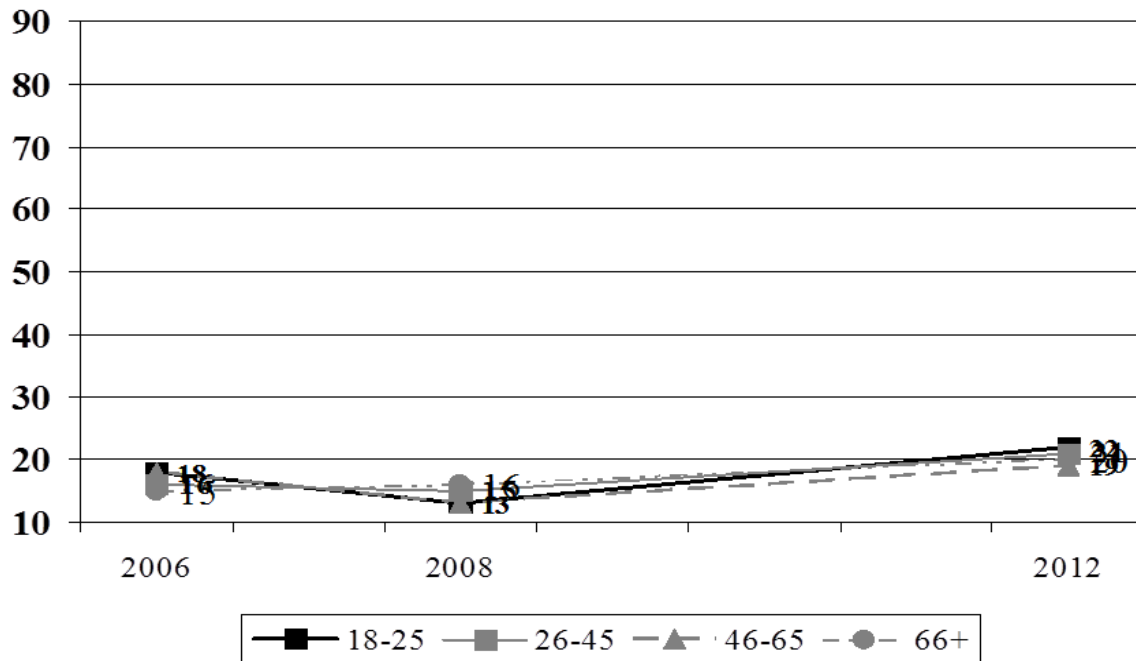


Figure 3. Responsibility for Holding Local Councillors Accountable (% Voters)

Note: Who should be responsible for: Making sure that, once elected, local government councilors do their jobs?

Cognitive Engagement

To what extent are South Africans and young people in particular, mentally engaged with the political process? We address this by examining two elements of what political scientists call “cognitive engagement,” that is, the degree to which they are interested in politics and discuss it with family and friends? As of the 2012 Afrobarometer survey, close to six-in-ten (56 percent) of all adult South Africans said they were “somewhat” or “very interested in public affairs” and seven-in-ten (71 percent) talk about “political matters” with friends or family “occasionally” or “frequently.”

Yet, again, there are only small difference across the age groups within each survey year, and no consistent differences amongst the cohorts across time. While “youth” tend be less interested (56 percent) than “middle aged adults” (61 percent) or “senior citizens” (63 percent) as of 2012, they are not statistically different from “younger adults” (54 percent). Indeed, between 1997 and 2006, the youth often displayed the highest levels of interest of all age groups. In fact, with the exception of the very first (1994) and most recent (2012) surveys, it is senior citizens who have consistently shown the least interest in politics, not the

youth (see Figure 4). The same general trends characterize political discussion. As of the 2012 survey, there was at most a five 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 5).

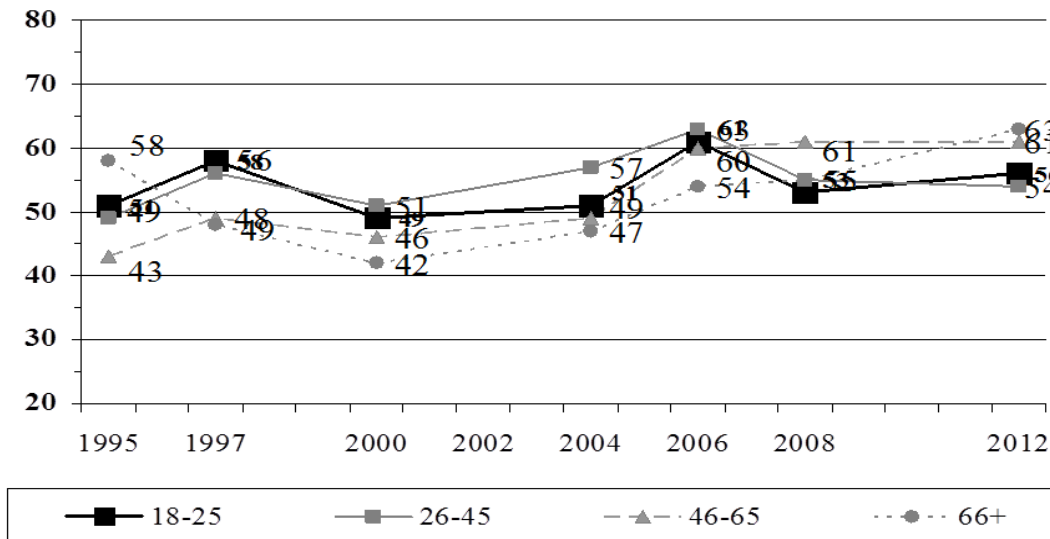


Figure 4. Political Interest (% Somewhat or Very Interested)

Note: How interested would you say you are in public affairs?

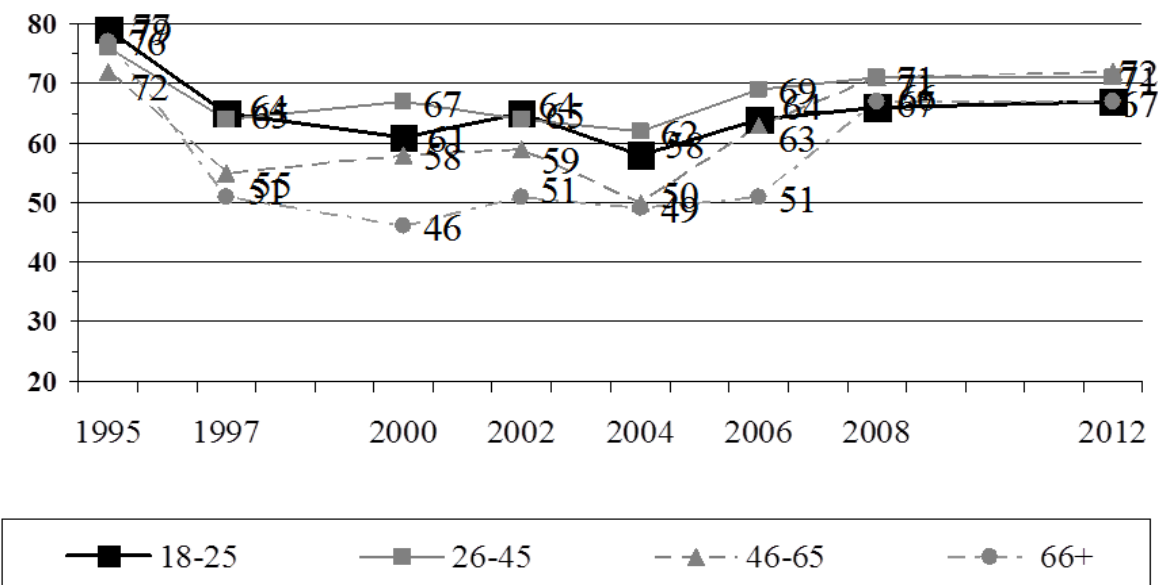


Figure 5. Political Discussion (% Occasionally or Frequently)

Note: "When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters ____?"

Cognitive Sophistication

To what extent do South Africans keep informed about politics and government? As of 2012, 51 percent said they read newspapers at least a few days a week. Along with senior citizens (38 percent), the youth (41 percent) are less likely to read newspapers on a frequent basis than younger (47 percent) or middle aged adults (52 percent). Yet these differences are not consistent across time: from 2002 and 2006, the youth were actually likely to read newspapers frequently (Figure 6). At the same time, the youth exhibit very low levels of what political scientists call “political competence”: just 18 percent of youth disagree with the statement, “Politics and government seem so complicated that you can’t really understand what’s going on.” But this was virtually the same result as yielded by all other age cohorts, a result that has remained stable since 1997 (Figure 7).

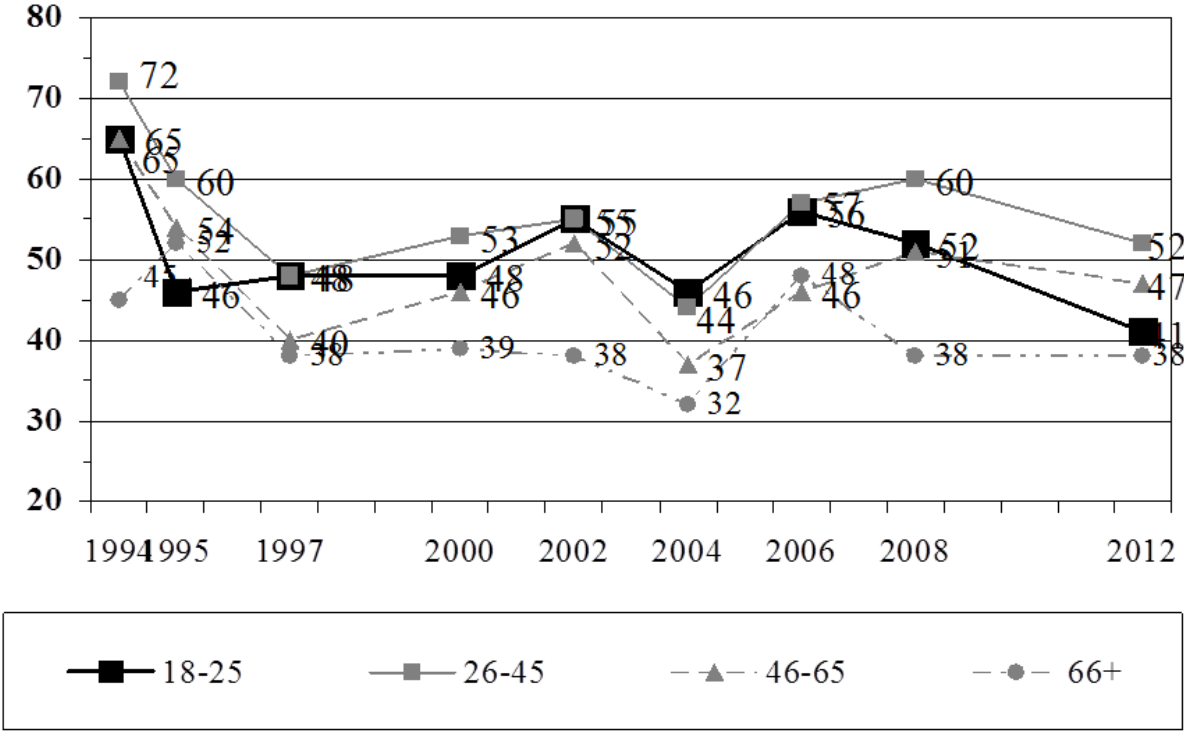


Figure 6. Newspaper Readership (% Every Day or Few Times A Week)

Note: How often do you get news from the following sources: Newspapers?

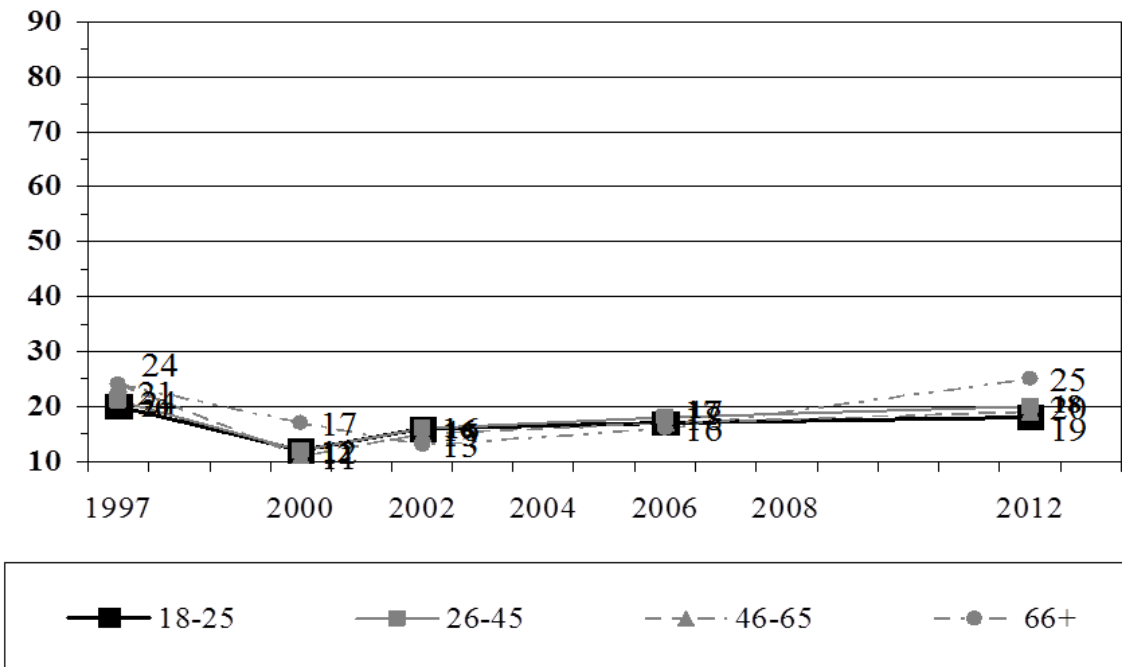


Figure 7. Politics and Government Affairs Understandable

Note: “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on.” (% Agree or Strongly Agree)

In the 2006 survey, Afrobarometer investigated the level of South Africans’ political knowledge across a wide range of dimensions. The results demonstrated that political awareness was highest with regard to whether or not the government had policies about the provision of free health care (85 percent) and education (77 percent), was moderately high with regard to a series of political facts such as the identity of the largest party in Parliament (85 percent), the number of terms the President can serve (48 percent) and the role of the Constitutional Court (36 percent), and varied widely with regard to the identity of incumbent leaders such as the Deputy President (60 percent), their local councillor (18 percent) and their designated Member of Parliament (1 percent). But, to return to the same refrain, there is no clear pattern whereby political awareness systematically increases (or decreases) with age. Across, these indicators, young adults (26-45) tend to have the highest levels of information, and senior citizens (66 and above) the least, but the differences are rarely substantively important (see Figure 8).

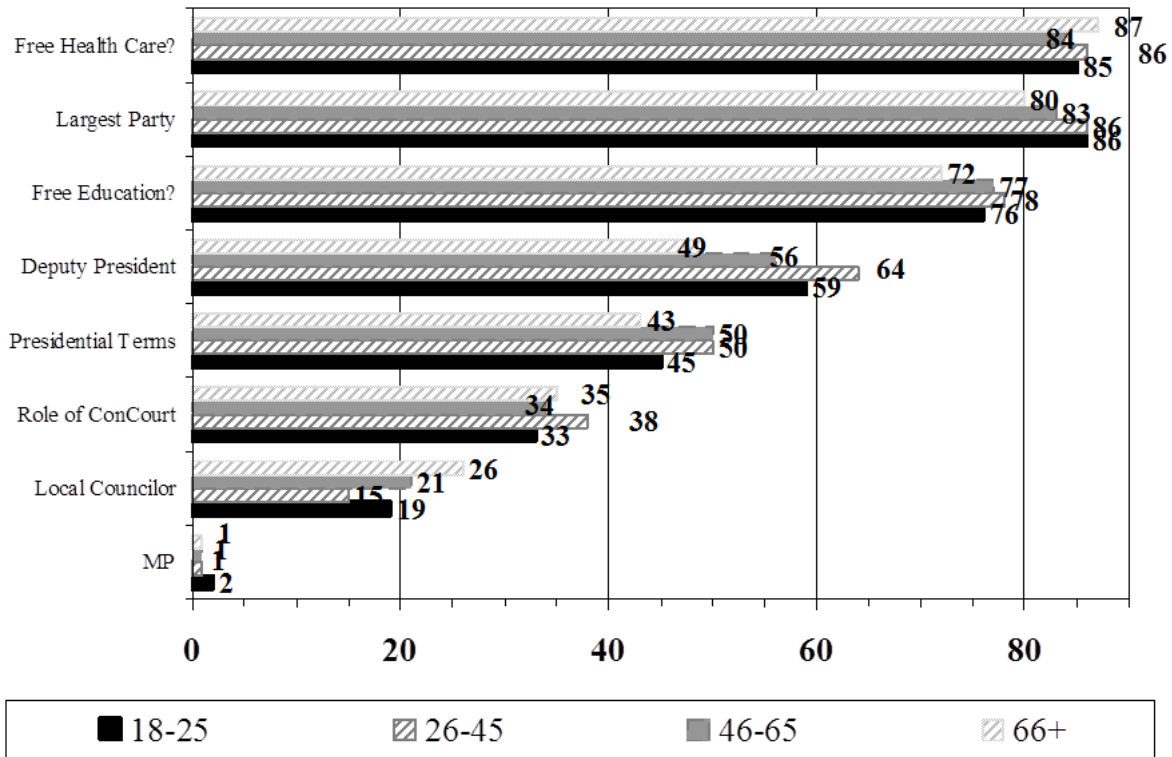


Figure 8. Political Knowledge: Incumbents, Facts and Policies (2006)

Source: Afrobarometer, 2006.

Thus, a clear and consistent picture has emerged. The surprising finding, in light of the common wisdom, is that across a range of indicators of how citizens think about their role and capacity as citizens, there is virtually no “age profile” to democratic citizenship in South Africa. Thus far, across several different indicators of democratic citizenship, the youth look almost identical to their older counterparts.

Voting and Campaigning

We find more meaningful age effects, however, when it comes to actual participation. First of all, 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 or not they “feel close” to any political party. Tracked since 1994, the youth are generally least likely to identify with a party (at least since 2000) (Figure 9). The differences, however, have generally been relatively small, though they increased in 2012 to 12 percentage points (with senior citizens most likely to identify with any party).

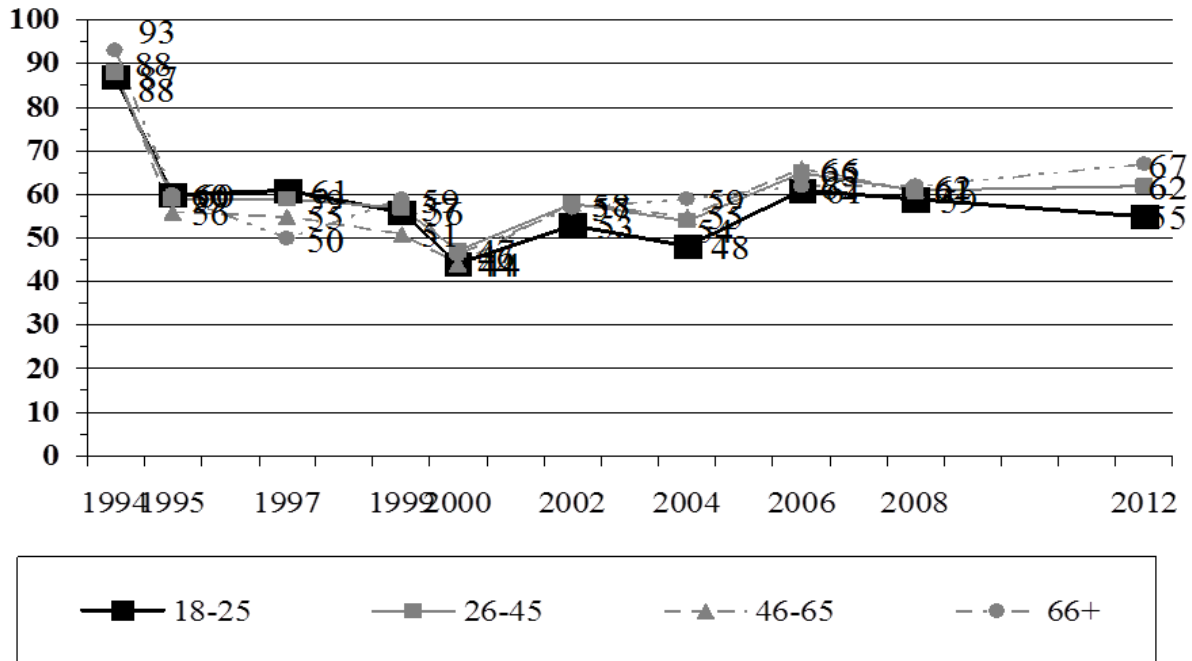


Figure 9. Partisan Identification

Note: Do you feel close to any particular political party?

To examine other indicators of electoral participation, we turn to questions from 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. The results demonstrate that the youth are less likely, and have become increasingly less likely to turn out and vote on election day than other South Africans (Figure 10). At the same time, it is important to note that this is a common finding around the world (Norris, 2002), and seems more a function of the factors associated with the aging process than anything specific to South Africa. Yet while younger voters were less likely to go to the polls in 2009, they were most likely to follow the 2009 election campaign (as well as in 1999) (Figure 11) and also most likely to have talked to friends or family about the election (Figure 12).

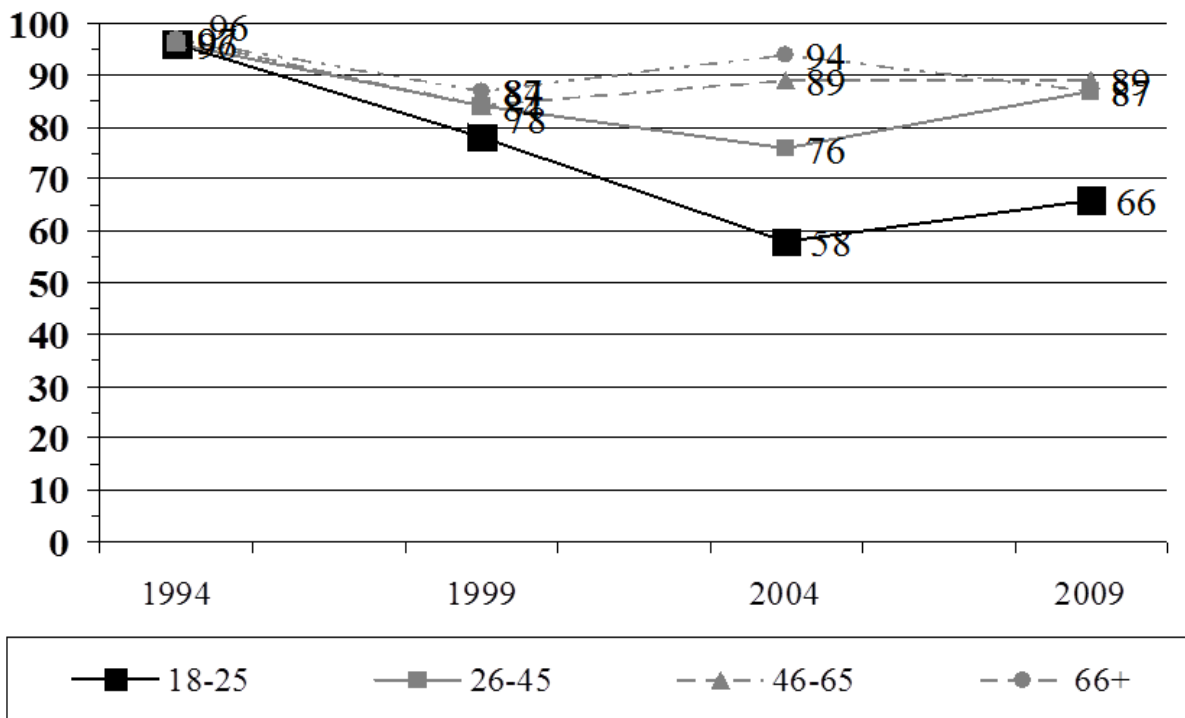


Figure 10. Voted in Recent Election

Note: With regard to the most recent national election in [2009], which statement is true for you? (% Voted)

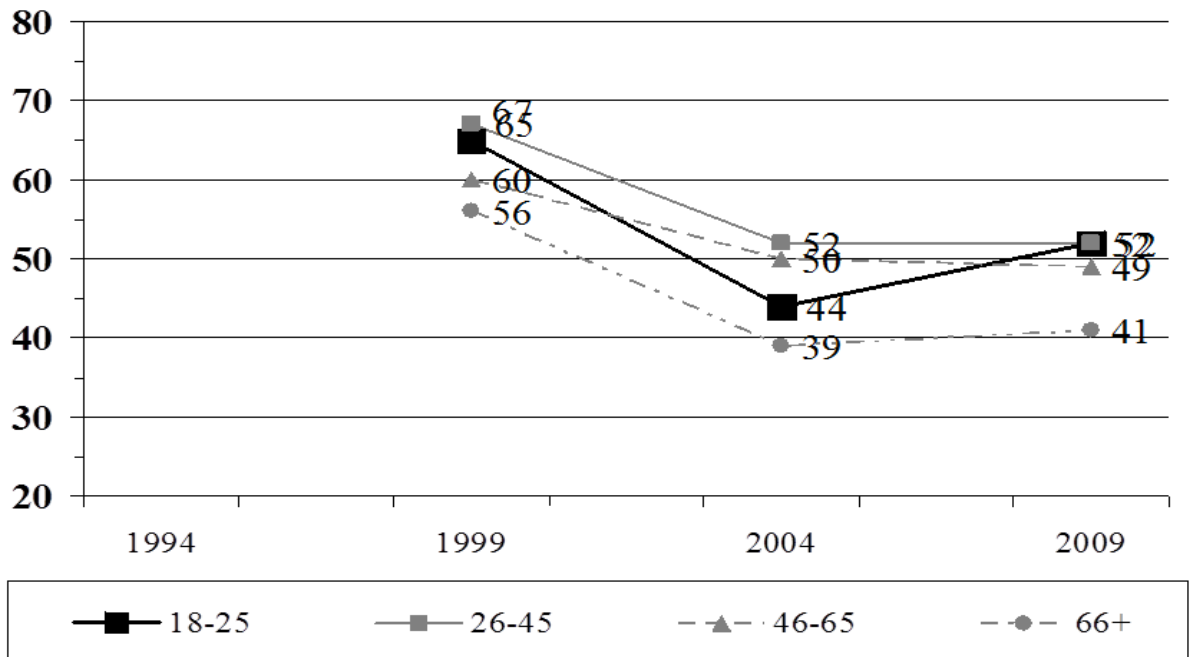


Figure 11. Followed Campaign (% Closely / Very Closely)

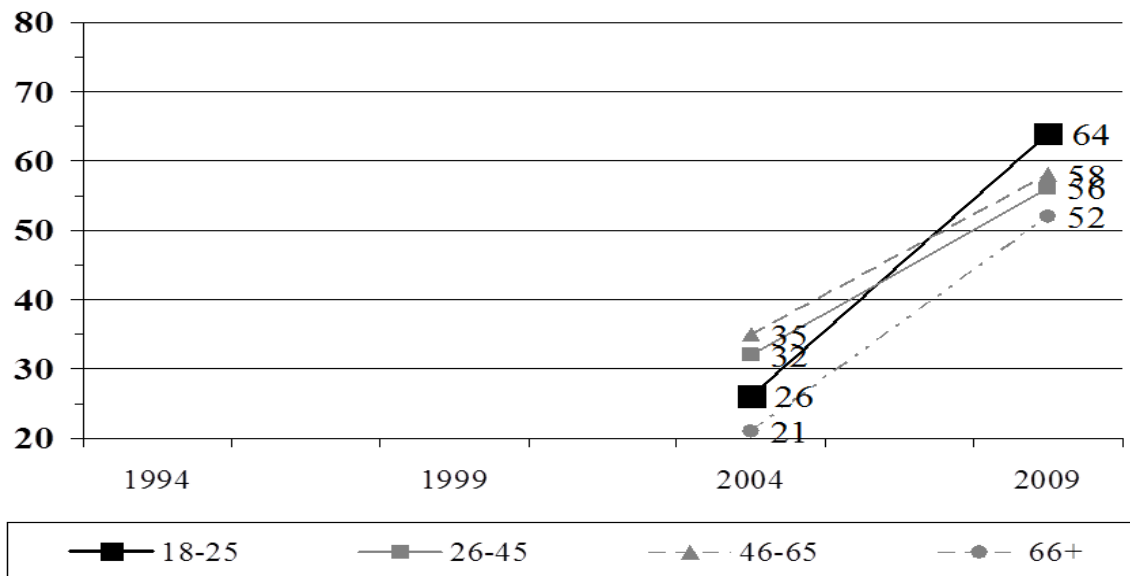


Figure 12. Discussed Campaign with Family (% Often or Sometimes)

Moreover, there are no age related profiles for a range of other types of campaign participation, such as the proportion of people who say they were contacted by a political party during the campaign (Figure 13), attended an election rally (Figure 14), or worked for a party or a candidate during the campaign (Figure 15).

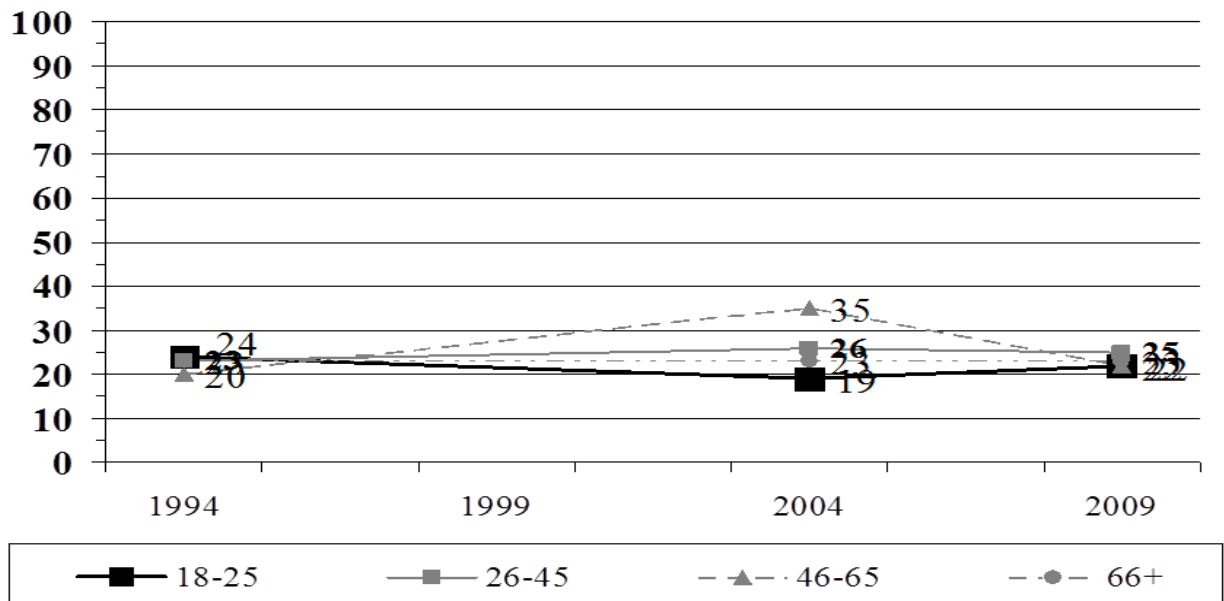


Figure 13. Contacted by Party during Campaign

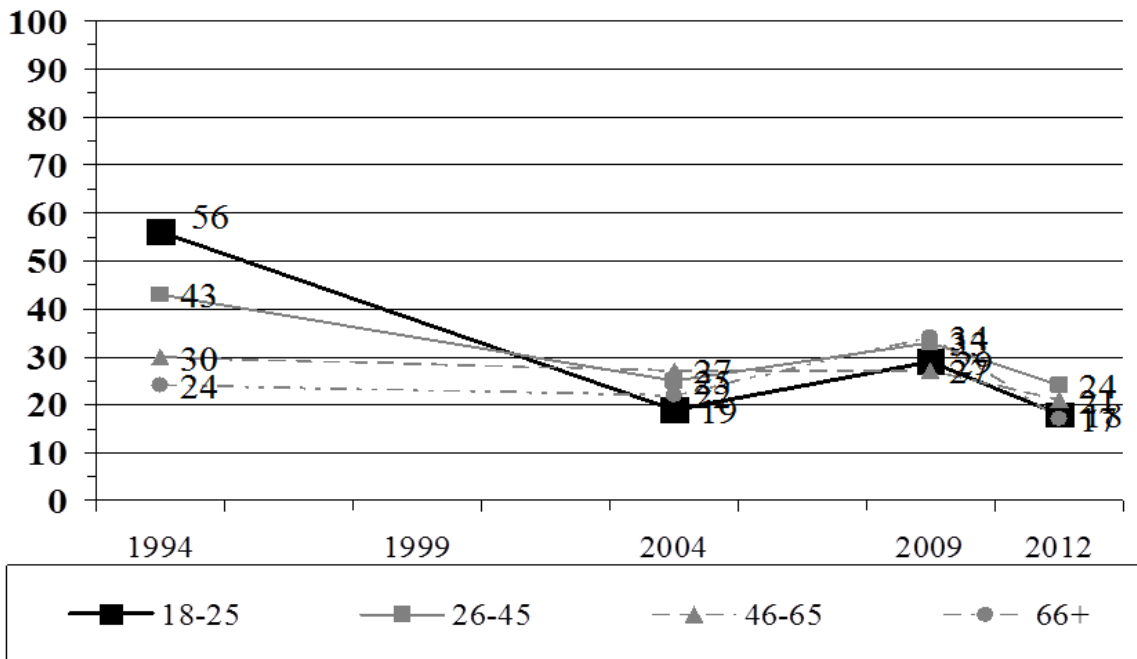


Figure 14. Attended Election Rally

Note: Thinking about the last national election in ____, did you attend a campaign meeting or rally?

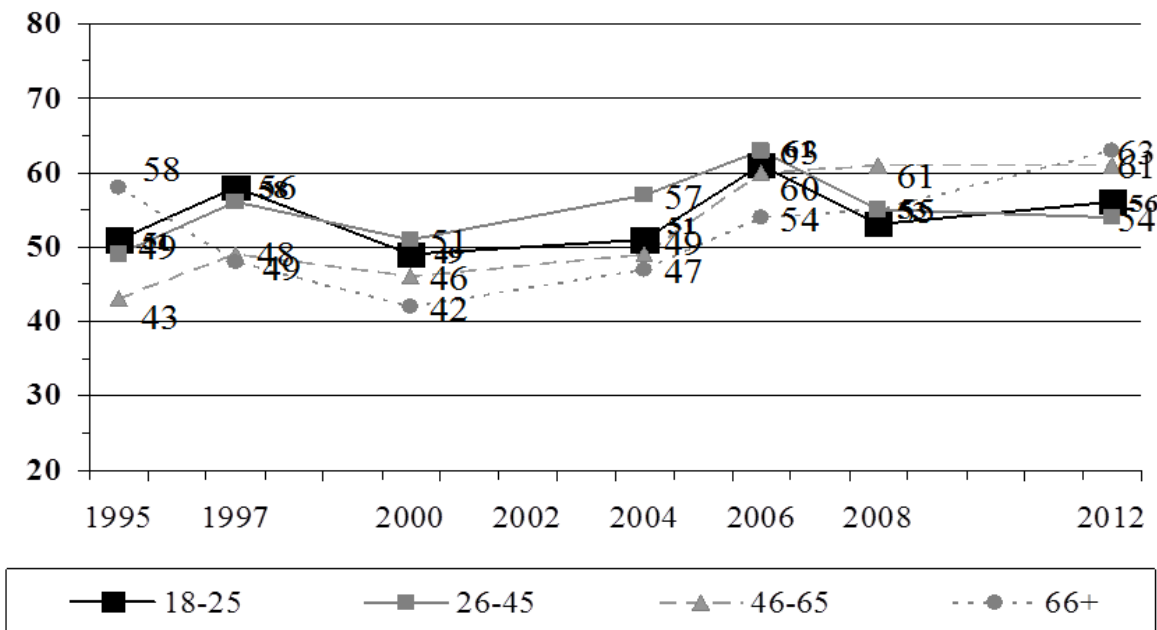


Figure 15. Worked for Party or Candidate

Note: Thinking about the last national election in ____, did you work for a candidate or party?

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, the youth are indeed significantly less likely to get involved in community politics or contact elected officials. As of 2012, 55 percent of all South Africans said they had attended a community meeting in the previous year, but the youth (49 per cent) were 14 percentage points less likely to participate than younger adults (63 percent) (Figure 16). And while 42 percent told Afrobarometer interviewers they had joined with others to raise an issue in their community, the youth (36 percent) were 10 percentage points less likely to do so than young adults (46 percent) (Figure 17). While 27 percent had contacted a local councillor in the previous year (Figure 18), older adults (31 percent) were almost twice as likely to do this as youth (16 percent). Moreover, the gap between the youth and other cohorts widened significantly since 2004. The same general pattern is evident in a set of questions asked in 2012 specifically about local government (Figure 19). The youth are slightly less likely to have observed 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 that problem. However, the differences are relatively small or non-existent in terms of whether or not they discussed the problem with community leaders, or complained to government officials or took their complaint to the news media.

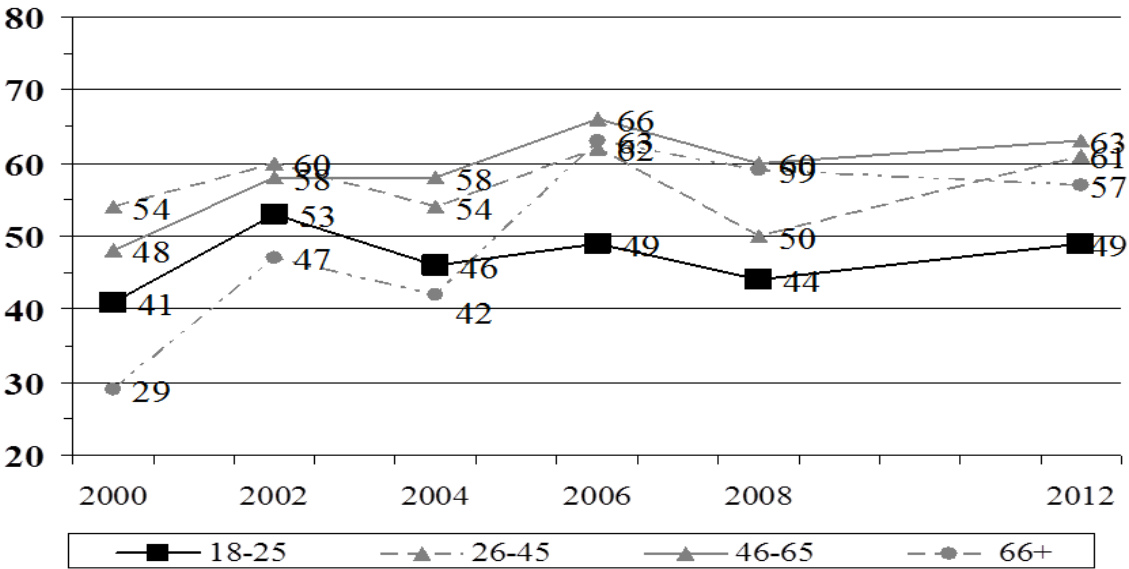


Figure 16. Attended Community Meetings

Note: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting?

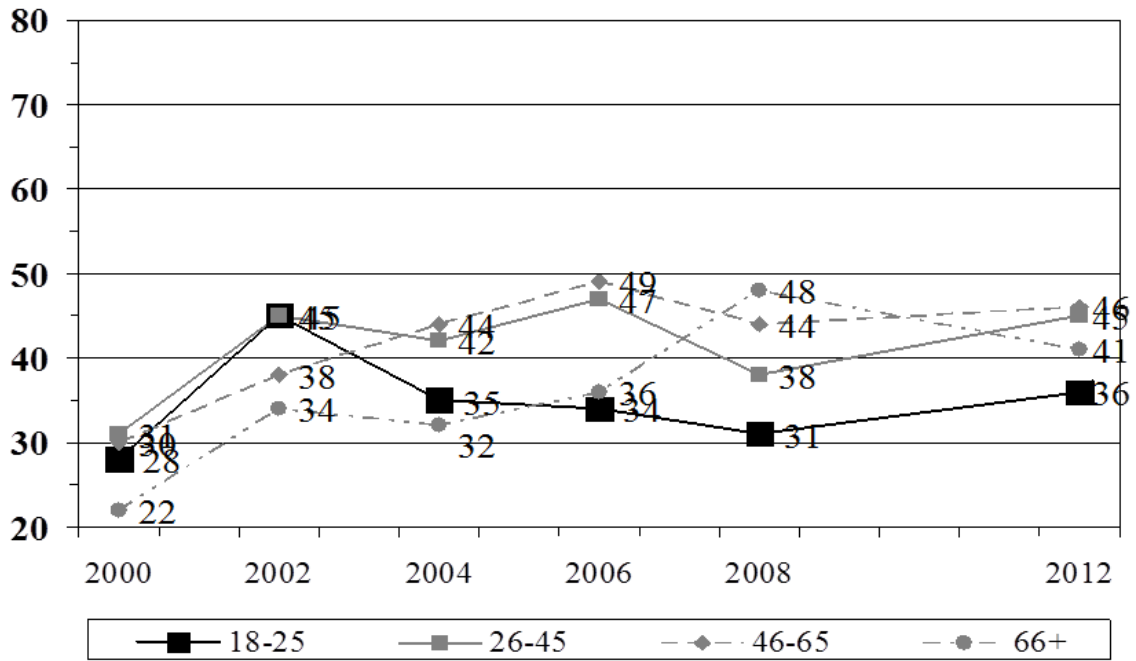


Figure 17. Joined With Others to Raise Issue

Note: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Got together with others to raise an issue?

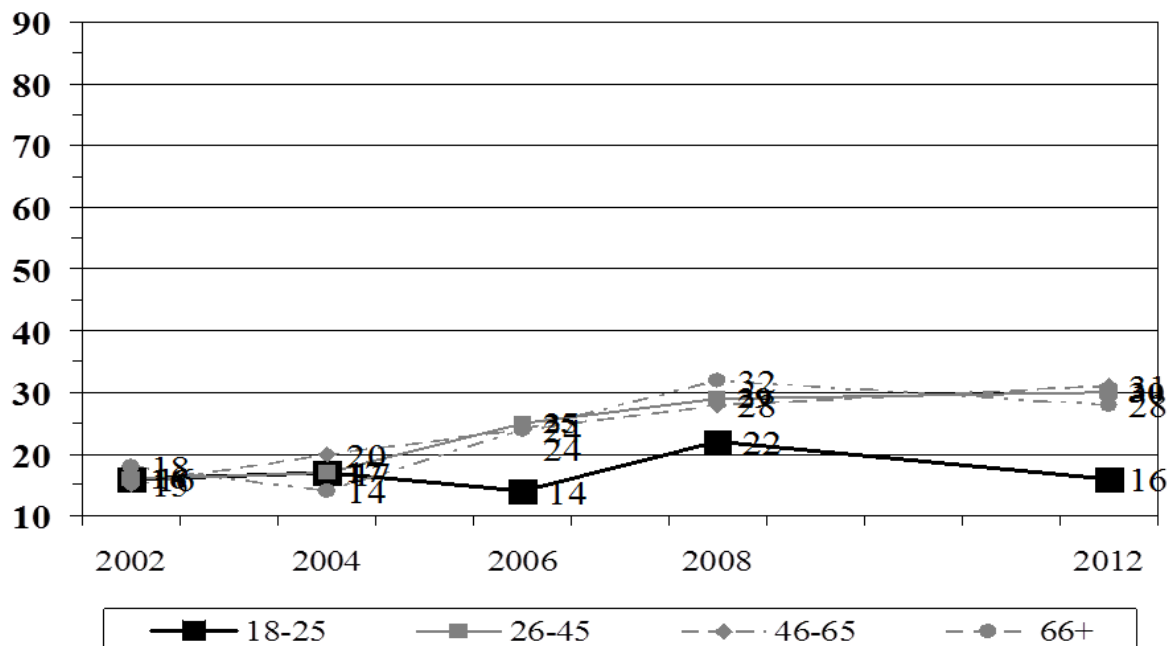


Figure 18. Contacted Local Councillor

Note: 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?

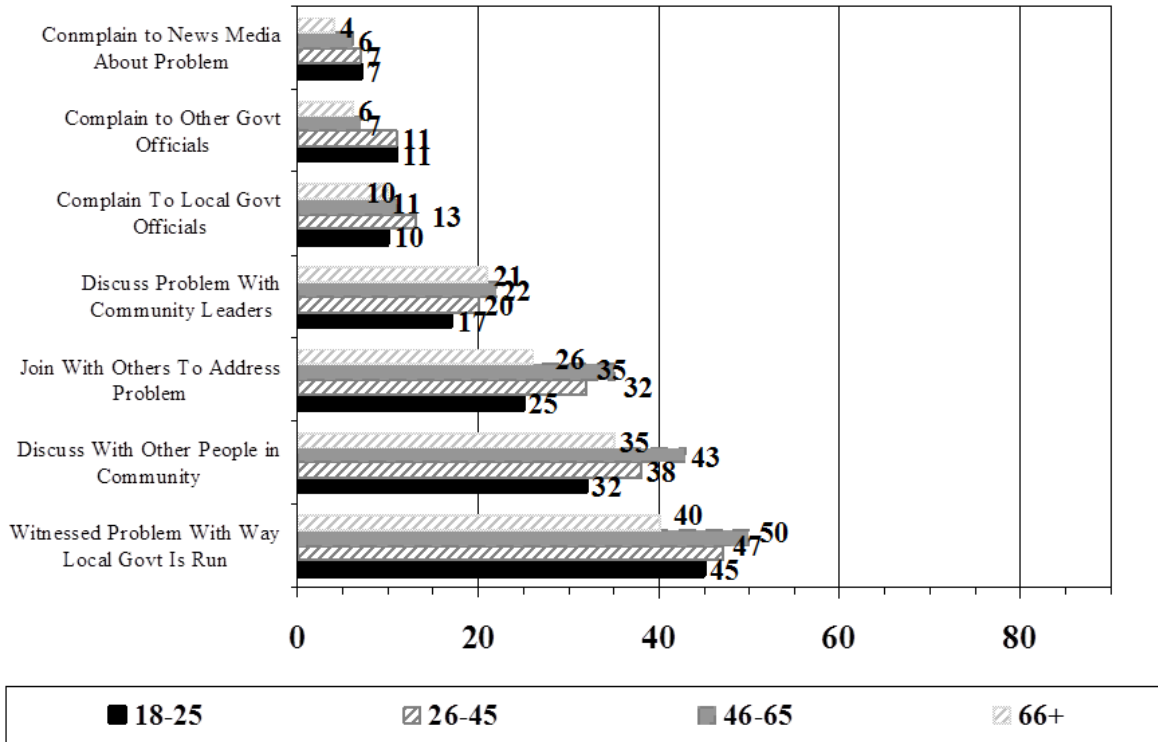


Figure 19. Contact with Local Government (2012)

Source: Afrobarometer, 2012.

Unconventional Participation: Protest and Political Violence

Thus, the youngest South African citizens, aged 18-25 are less likely to take part in conventional forms of politics such as voting, contacting, and communing (but not campaigning). We now turn to examine indicators of unconventional forms of participation, particularly protest and the use of violence. Afrobarometer surveys tracked relatively high rates of self-reported participation in protest (“attending a demonstration or protest march”) between 2000 and 2006, but reflect a downward trend thereafter. Yet, in contrast to the typical media depiction of township protests, protest potential amongst the youth has been relatively high, but not any higher than young adults (those aged 26-45) (Figure 20). And as of 2012, 4 percent of respondents 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, however, there are no significant differences between the rate at which youth resort to violence and that of other citizens (though senior citizens are consistently less likely to do so) (Figure 21). 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 percent) (Figure 22). And in responses to a new set of questions asked in 2012, 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) (Figure 23).

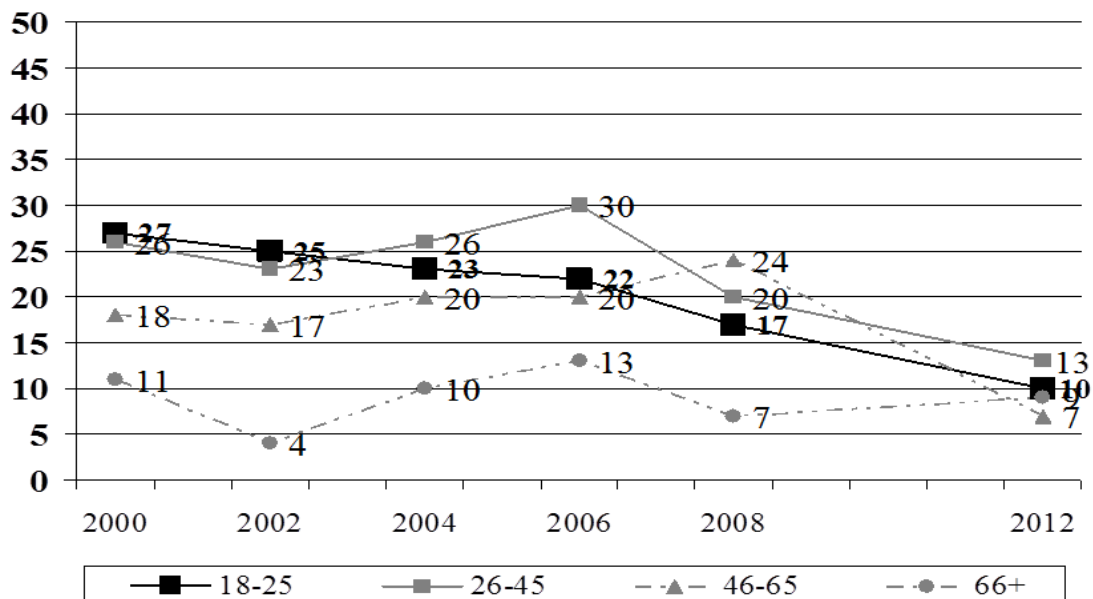


Figure 20. Attended Protest or Demonstration

Note: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a demonstration or protest march?

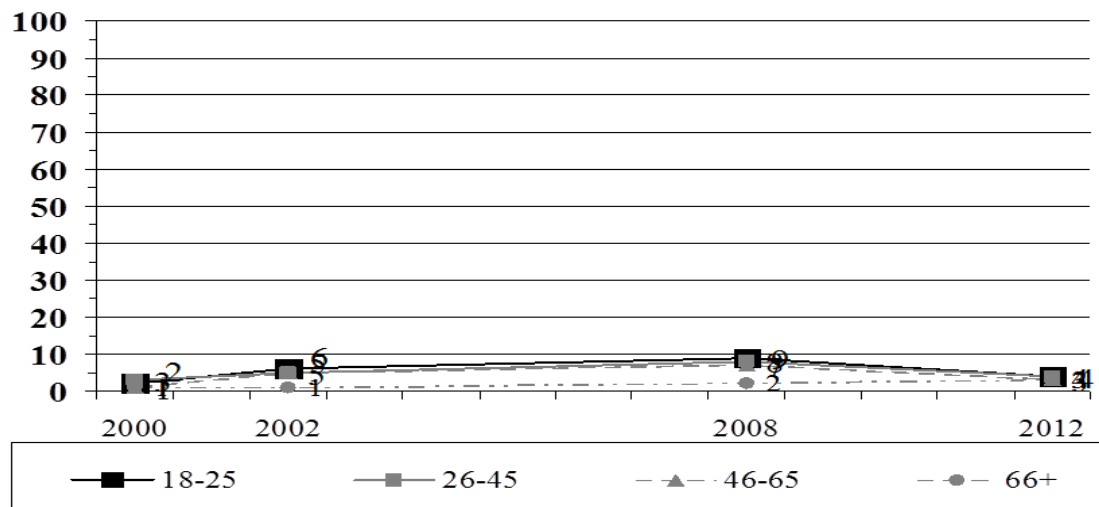


Figure 21. Used Force or Violence for Political Cause

Note: Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Used force or violence for a political cause?

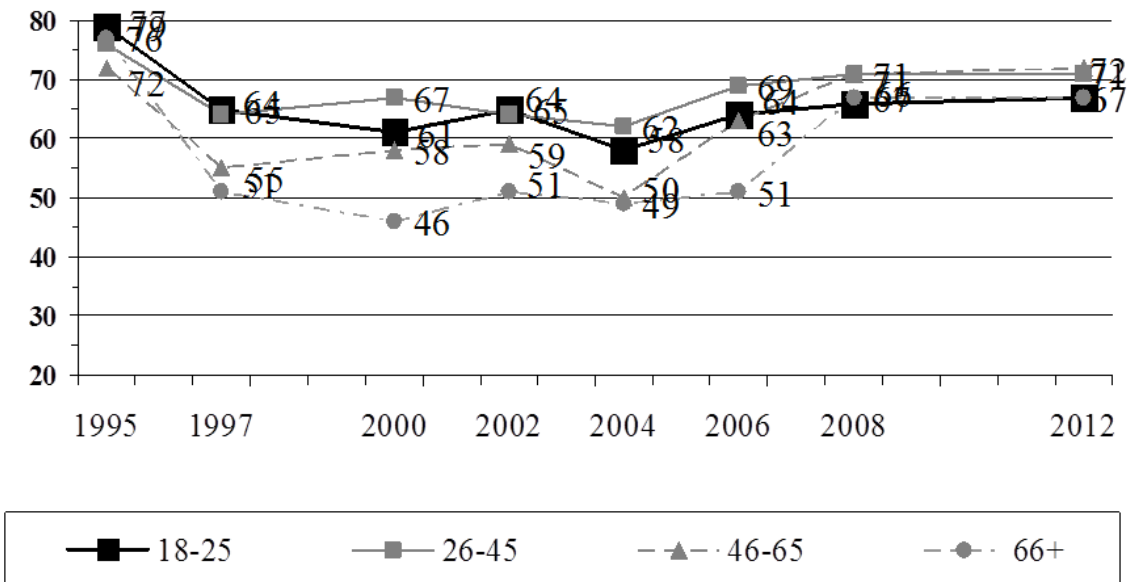


Figure 22. Violence Never Justified

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

Statement 1: The use of violence is never justified in South African politics today.

Statement 2: In this country, it is sometimes necessary to use violence in support of a just cause.

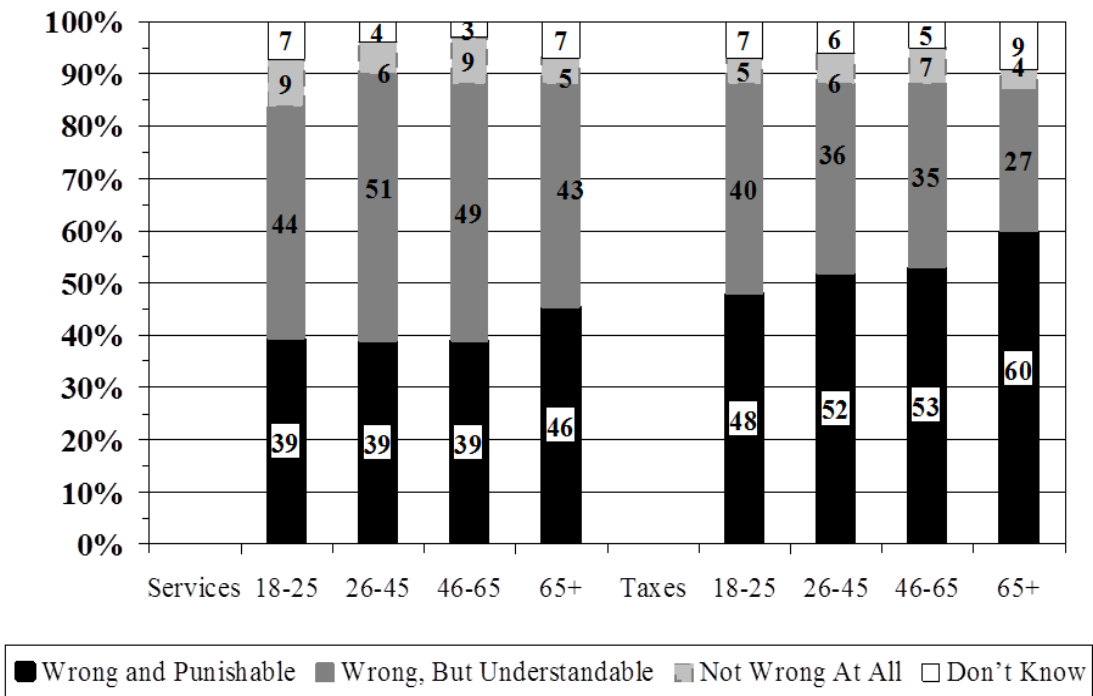


Figure 23. Compliance Morality (2012)

Source: Afrobarometer, 2012.

Others as Political Actors

What do young South Africans think about other citizens and residents? First, while just 17 percent agreed, in the 2012 Afrobarometer survey, that “most people can be trusted” (a widely cited dimension of social capital: see Putnam, 1993; Norris, 2002), the figure was slightly higher for youth respondents (19 percent) (Not Shown). Afrobarometer has not measured South Africans’ levels of (in)tolerance of other people. However, the preeminent 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 and Gouws, 2003). Given the country’s recent history, no analysis of the country’s 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 widely in media coverage of the wave of xenophobic violence that spread across South Africa’s townships in 2007. Indeed, 29 percent of the youth favoured, at least as of 2008, a total prohibition on immigration into the country, and 25 percent supported total repatriation of all foreign residents. These figures were both significantly higher than for older respondents. However, once they are asked about possible anti-foreigner behaviours, the approximately one-third who say they would be likely to join with others to prevent immigrants from moving into their neighbourhood (35 percent), operating a business in their area (36 percent), enrolling in local schools (35 percent), or becoming a co-worker (33 percent), is statistically indistinguishable from the responses of older cohorts. Thus, consistent with Gibson and Gouws’ 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 the problem on the youth.

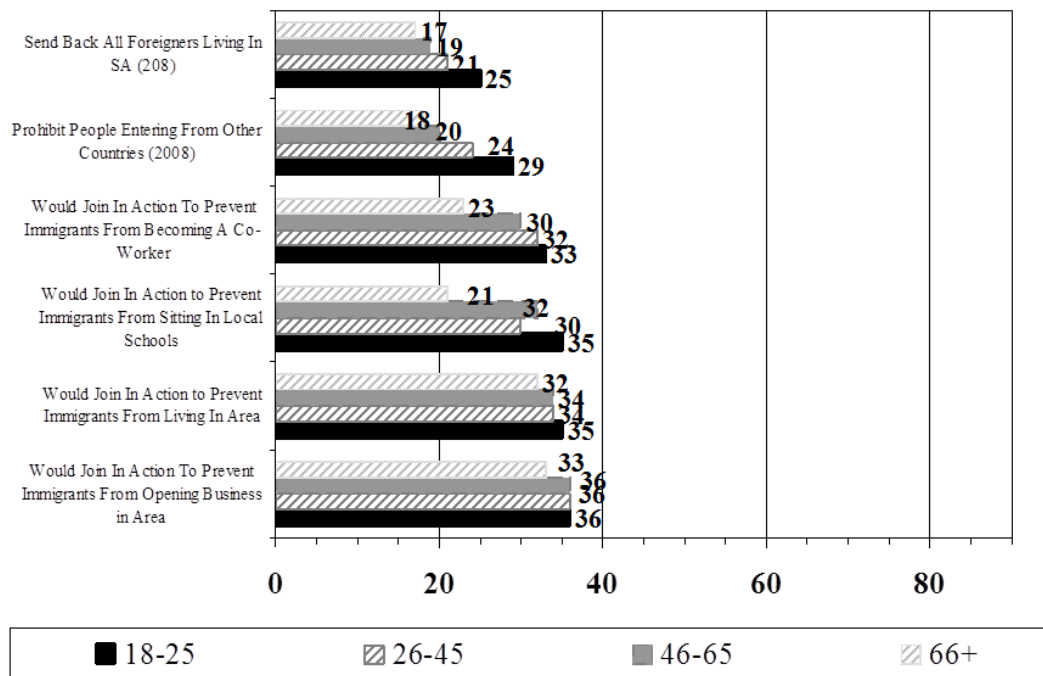


Figure 24. Policy Preferences and Potential Intolerant Actions toward Foreigners

Source: Afrobarometer, 2012.

Contextualizing Youth Political Engagement

In contrast to the common wisdom, South Africa’s youth are no different from their older fellow citizens in a wide range of attitudes about 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, but not all other age cohorts, and the differences are certainly not large. And they are no more likely than other South Africans to hold negative views and intentions toward immigrants.

There are larger differences, however, in terms of some, but not all indicators of physical engagement in the political process. The 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 or working for political parties, and they are most likely to follow election campaigns. Between elections, however, the youth are significantly less likely to join together with people 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? The popular wisdom might suggest that they harbour systematically different values toward the new South Africa and its democratic system: that they are more apathetic and more alienated, and that they possess lower levels of national identity, are less committed to the democratic process, and are less likely to see state enforcement institutions as legitimate, than older generations.

Apathy and Alienation

We have already seen that the youth are no more apathetic, with equal levels of political interest and political discussion, as other age cohorts. Are they more alienated? The longest repeated item on the Afrobarometer that taps into the concept of alienation is a series of questions that ask people how frequently they believe elected leaders listen to them. Whether we ask about Members of Parliament, (Figure 25) or Local Councillors (Figure 26), we see very 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.

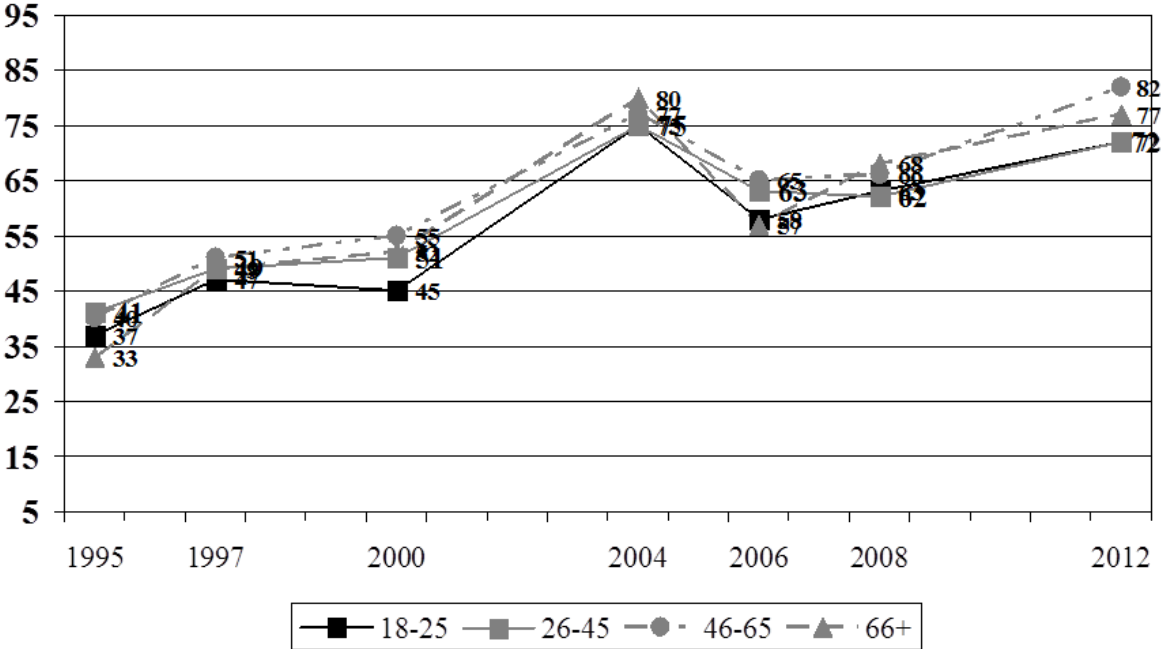


Figure 25. Alienation: Members of Parliament Don't Listen to People like Me

Note: MPs Listen To People (Never / Only Sometimes)

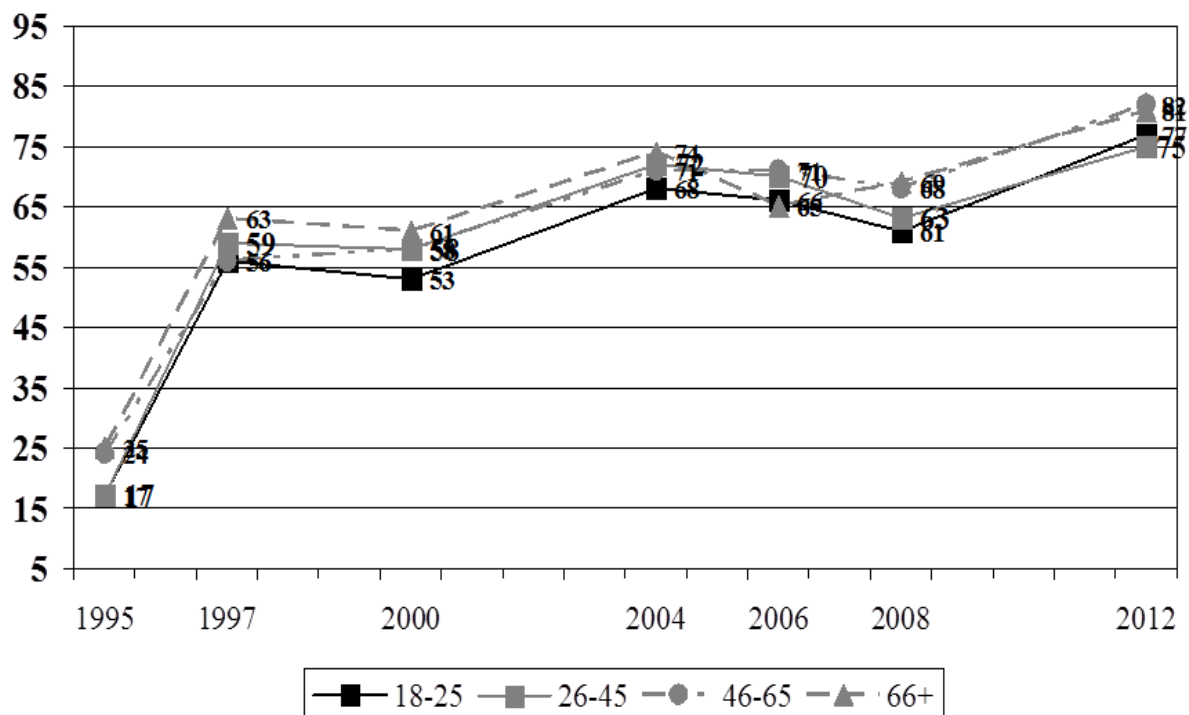


Figure 26. Alienation: Local Councillors Don't Listen to People Like Me

Note: MPs Listen To People (Never / 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 those of other age groups, exhibit very high levels of national identity. They are proud of being South African (see Figure 27). 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).

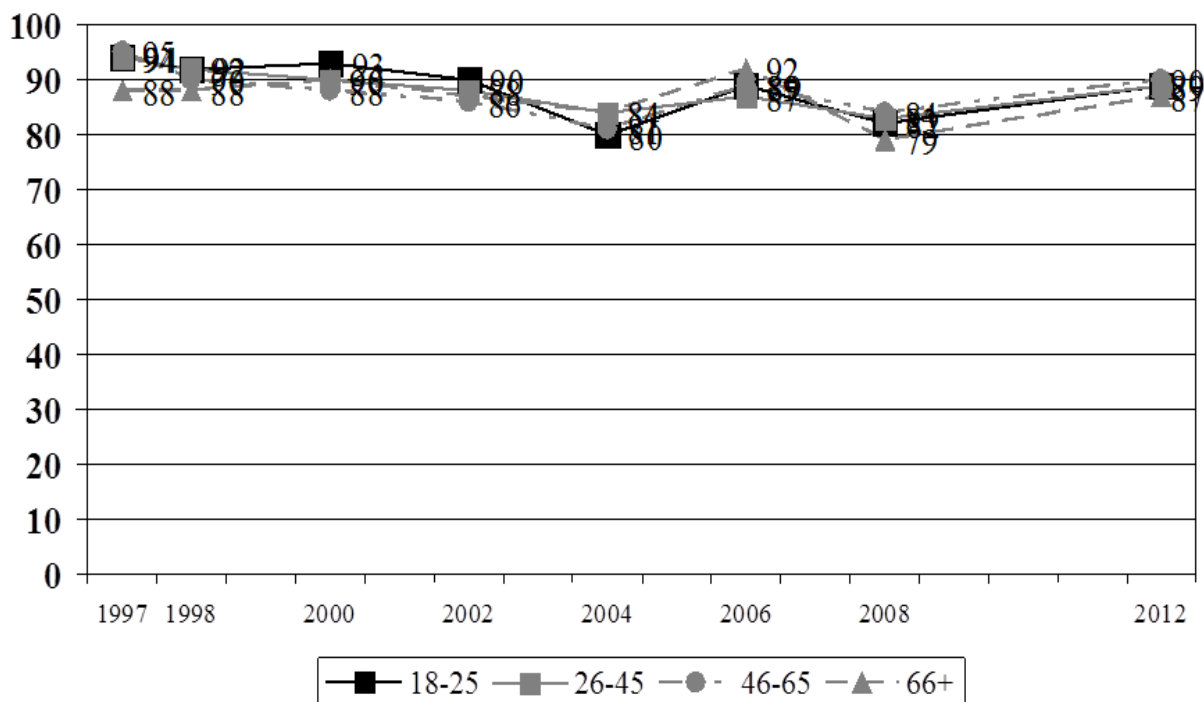


Figure 27. Pride in SA National Identity

Note: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: It makes you proud to be called a South African.

Democratic Regime

Youth respondents are, in fact, less likely than others to believe that “democracy is always preferable” to an authoritarian government (by 4 percentage points) (Figure 28). They are also less likely to reject a regime where “Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office” (Figure 29). And they are also the least likely 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 percent, 8 points lower than senior citizens) (Figure 30). Yet while these differences are meaningful and should not be ignored, the far more important finding is the generally weak level of support for democracy *across* all age groups.

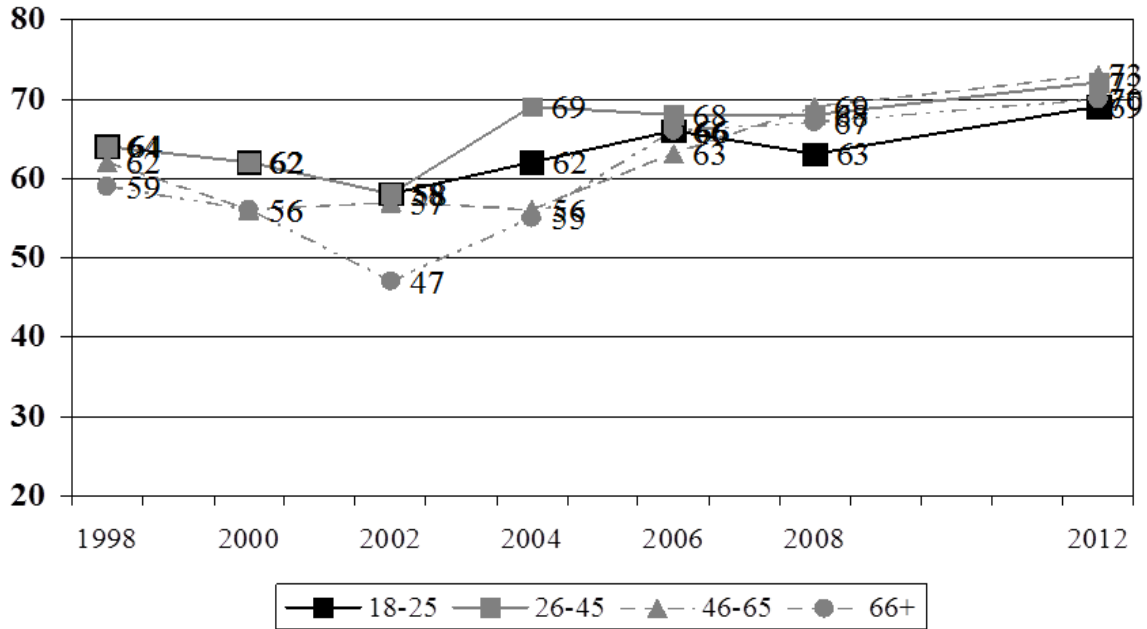


Figure 28. Support for Democracy

Note: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

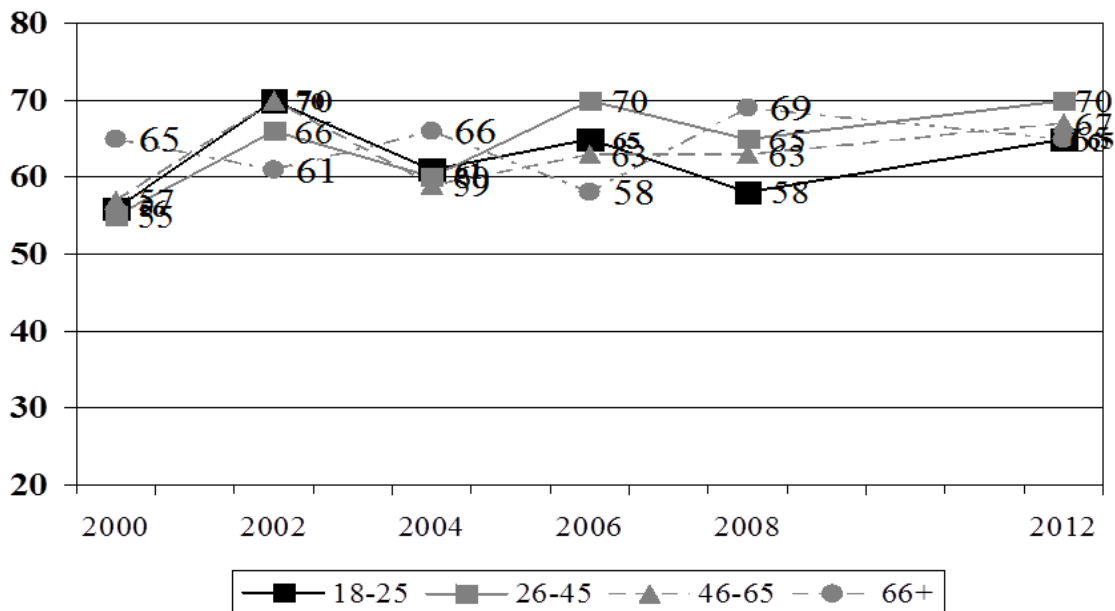


Figure 29. Rejection of One-Party Rule

Note: 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?

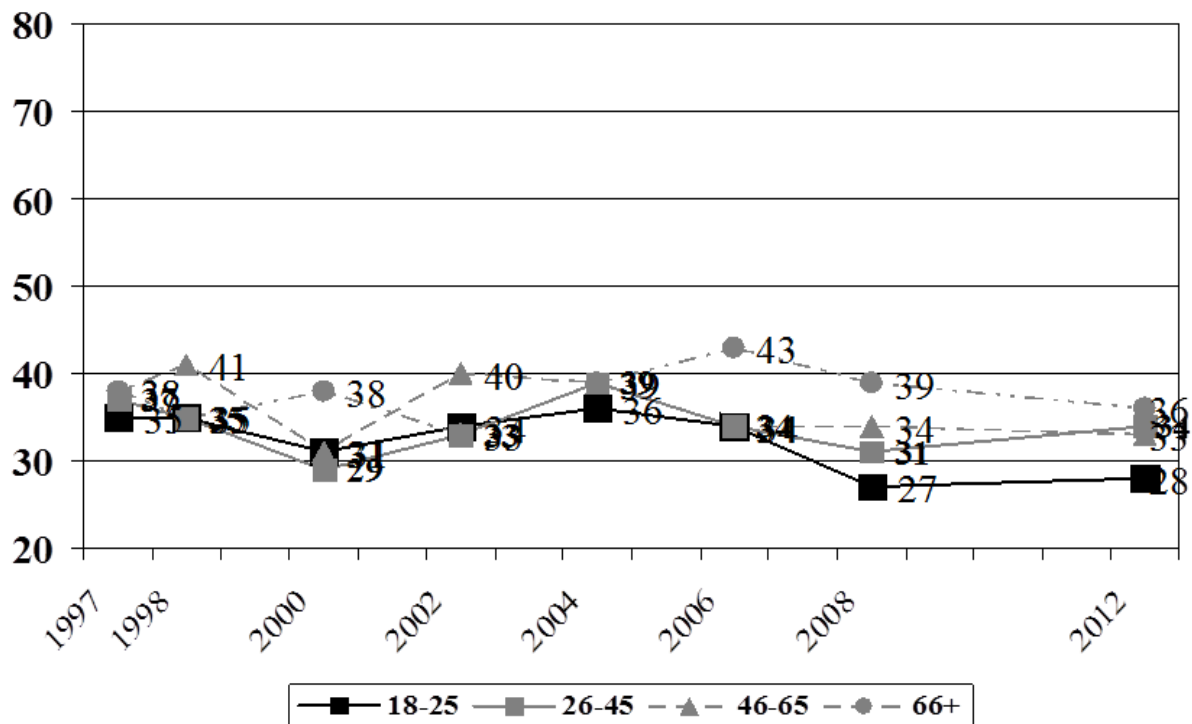


Figure 30. Unwilling to Live Under 'Dictatorship That Delivers'

Note: 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?

State Legitimacy

Finally, we turn to examine some 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 state are appropriate, and that their decisions ought to be obeyed regardless of whether or not one agrees with those decisions (Easton, 1965). Young South Africans are no less likely than other citizens to agree that, "The Courts have the right to make decisions that people always have to abide by" (Figure 31) or that "The police always have the right to make people obey the law" (Figure 32).

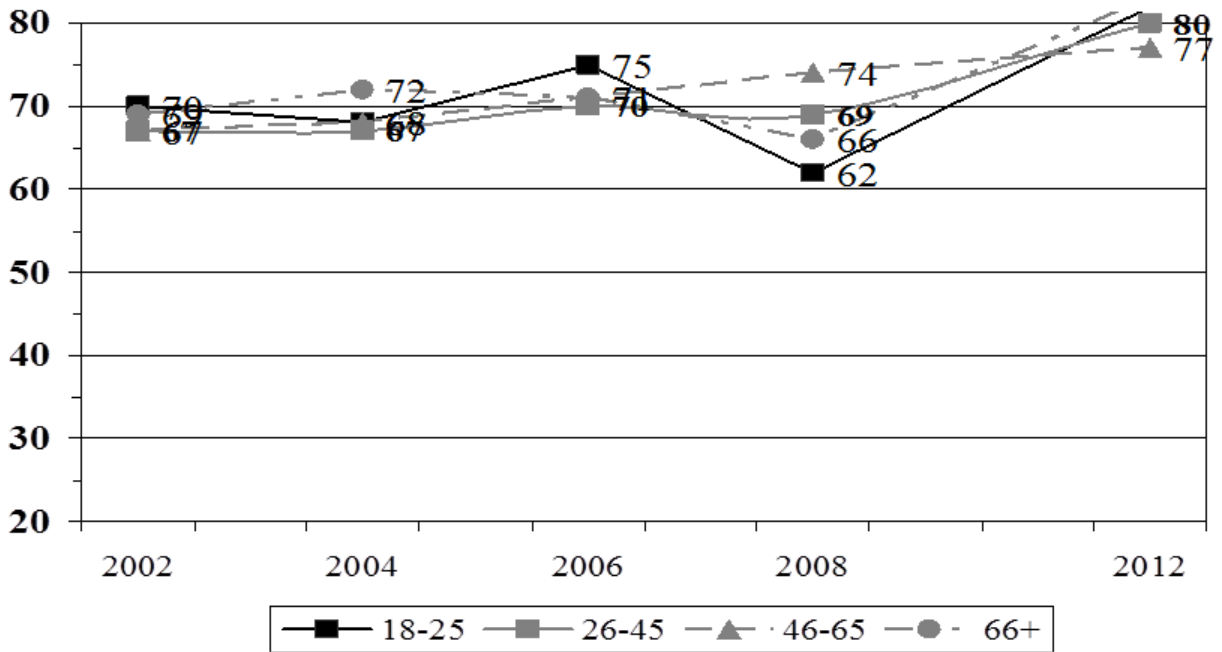


Figure 31. Courts Have To Make Binding Decisions by Age Cohort

Note: 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.

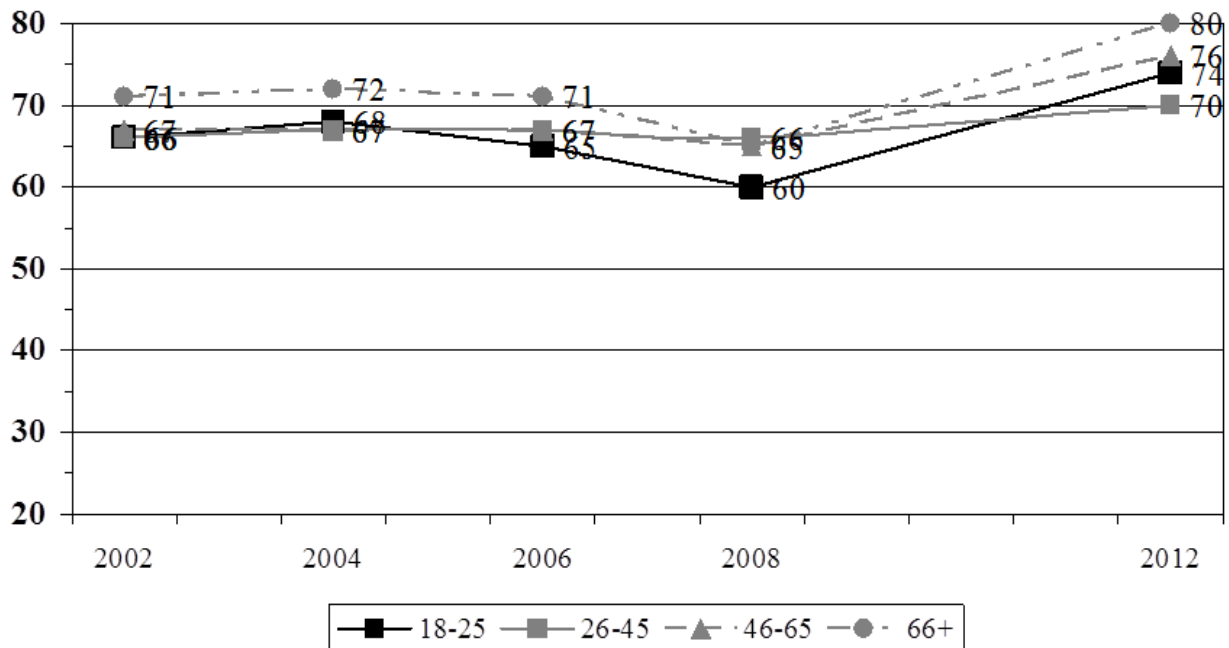


Figure 32. Police Have Right to Make People Obey the Law

Note: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: The police always have the right to make people obey the law.

Youth and Drivers of Political Participation

What are the drivers of political participation in South Africa, and are they the same amongst young people as older citizens? In order to answer this question, we used the Afrobarometer South Africa 2008 data set and ran a series of statistical analyses called multiple regression which test the extent to which a number of individual level characteristics, values and attitudes actually predict, or explain whether a person actually participated in various activities, as well as how often they participated. Using the same set of predictor variables, we tested three separate 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* (which is an average index of the frequency with which people contact members of parliament, government officials, and local councillors), and *protesting* (which is an average index of the frequency with which people attend protest demonstrations and took part in political violence).

As predictor variables, we use many of the very factors that we have reviewed in this paper, but also add other important issues which 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 whether or not they are *member of 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 or not they feel able to get together with others to make members of parliament 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 they feel *citizens should hold leaders accountable*, whether they think *citizens should be critical*, and whether *citizens should tell their leaders what to do*. And finally, beyond these “main effects,” we also wanted to know whether there were any “interaction effects.” That is, do any of these factors have different effects amongst the youth? Thus, 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, as 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, =0.285), followed by youth (B=0.237), cognitive

engagement (0.167), race (being black) ($B=0.144$) and demand for democracy (0.094). Thus, while we previously saw that youth had lower rates of attendance at community meetings, or joining in issue groups than other South Africans, once we “hold constant,” or 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 organisations. But another reason is the peculiar effect of two factors amongst the youth. While cognitive engagement, in general, increases the likelihood of community participation, it reduces it amongst those aged 18 to 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 $R^2 = 0.176$) (the second column of Table 1). The strongest predictor, again, is membership in a community group ($B=0.270$) followed by a sense of internal efficacy ($B=0.145$), being black (0.118), cognitive engagement (0.094) and newspaper readership (0.057). 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.

Finally, these variables provide a much less effective set of predictors of participation in violent protest, explaining just 6.2 percent of the variance. Again, the most important driver is membership in a community group ($B=0.146$) followed by cognitive engagement (0.092), being black (0.068) and male (.059). Two values also play important roles. Those people who demand democracy (-0.061) and those who see the country’s law enforcement institutions as legitimate (-0.052) 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 *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*	Contacting	Protesting
Demographics			
Youth (Aged 18-25)	0.237***	--	--
Gender (Male)	0.065***	--	0.059**
Race (Black)	0.144***	0.118***	0.068***
Lived Poverty	0.083***	0.050*	--
Member of Community Group	0.285***	0.270***	0.146***
Cognitive Sophistication			
Newspaper Readership	--	0.057**	--
Cognitive Engagement	0.167***	0.094***	0.092***
Internal Efficacy	0.057**	0.145***	--
Values			
National Identity	--	--	NS
Demand for Democracy	0.094***	--	-0.061**
State Legitimacy	--	--	-0.052*
Voters Should Hold Leaders Accountable	0.057**	0.046*	--
Interactions			
Youth * Member of Community Group		--	0.064**
Youth * Cognitive Engagement	-.0102**		
Youth * National Identity	-0.188**	--	-0.150*
Youth * Demand for Democracy	--	-0.138*	--
Summary Statistics			
Multiple r	0.434	0.423	0.257
Adjusted R ²	0.185	0.176	0.062

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

** Average construct of the frequency with which people contact members of parliament, government officials, local councillors

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

Note: Cells display standardized (Beta) regression coefficients

Source: 2008 Afrobarometer South Africa Survey.

Conclusion

This very brief review of indicators of key dimensions of South Africa's political culture indicates that there *are* a series of 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 different indicators, we have witnessed consistently that there is no, or a relatively minor, age profile to South African political culture. As a recent analysis of the "Born Free" generation (defined as all people who had come of age politically since the passage of the

1996 Constitution), concludes, “Rather 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, forthcoming: 21).

On one hand, the fact that the youth are not “worse” than their elders may reassure those who are concerned about the state of the youth. On the other hand, this same finding should be cause for concern given that the youth have reached political maturity in a free and democratic political system, and that they have been educated by a new school curriculum that claimed 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 and liberties of which their parents could have only dreamt, all South Africans now confront a “thin” form of democracy in which, with the exception of local ward councillors, no putatively elected representative at the provincial or national level are actually elected to office by the voters, but are rather 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.

And while South Africa experienced substantial growth over the last decade, increasing the wealth of one-fifth of all black South Africans and moving one-in-ten into the middle class, enduring unemployment and poverty have meant that the children of the bottom two-fifths of South African households now grow up under worse material conditions than their parents (Leibbrandt *et al.*, 2006; Leibbrandt and Levinsohn, 2011).

And while there has been a drive toward universal education, with a new school curriculum designed to produce more engaged citizens, the intended value outcomes were so implicit in the new curriculum that poorly trained teachers in increasingly dysfunctional schools have struggled to produce any substantially changes in the belief systems of their matriculants.

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