

Western Africa: Popular Support for Investing in Youth, Priority Areas, and Government Performance

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Africa has the youngest population in the world with over 420 million people between the ages of 15 to 35 years – the definition of youth used by the African Union. There is probably no more important task today than investing in youth. Ensuring that children and youth are well educated and healthy and have opportunities for employment when reaching adulthood is a top priority. This is often not the case. Estimates of the Human Capital Index at the World Bank suggest that children may reach only a fraction of their potential in adulthood.

The African Union has developed policies and programs at the continental level to steer the continent towards the benefits from the demographic dividend. These policies include the African Youth Charter, Youth Decade Plan of Action, and the Malabo Decision on Youth Empowerment. In particular, the Youth Decade Plan of Action focuses on five key priority areas: Education and Skills Development; Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship; Governance, Peace, and Security; Youth Health and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights; and Agriculture, Climate Change, and the Environment. To inform those policies, data are needed. This data brief was prepared ahead of Africa Youth Day to measure levels of popular support for investing in youth, priority interventions to do so, and perceptions of Government performance. Estimates in the series are provided for Africa as a whole, by sub-region, and at the level of individual counties. Measures of the perceived performance of Governments in a wide range of areas and changes in performance over time are also provided. Comparisons are made by gender and by age group (i.e., youth versus older individuals).

Series of briefs in collaboration with the
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Background: Youth are defined by the African Union as the population from 15 to 35 years of age. This brief was prepared ahead of Africa Youth Day on November 1 as part of a series measuring levels of popular support for investing in youth, priority interventions to do so, and perceptions of government performance as well as changes in performance over time. Estimates are provided for Africa as a whole, by sub-region, and at the level of individual counties. Comparisons are made by gender and by age group (i.e., youth versus older individuals). The analysis is based on the last two survey waves from the Afrobarometer. It was conducted to inform research, policy dialogue, and capacity enhancement activities at UNESCO IICBA, including activities related to multi-country programs such as the Africa Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) 19 Hub and the European Union Regional Teachers Initiative for Africa.

Key findings: Using data from the Afrobarometer, this brief assesses the extent of popular support for investing in youth and priority interventions to do so. The performance of Governments in various areas and changes in performance over time are also measured.

- Respondents to the surveys are asked if they would support higher government taxation to invest in youth. More than half state that they would.
- In terms of priorities for investment, employment (especially job creation) tends to come first, followed by education. The level of priority granted to social services tends to be lower. Very few individuals state that Governments should not spend.
- Ratings of government performance in a range of sectors tend to be low, although they are higher for basic services than for issues related to jobs and the economy.
- There is a decline in recent years in the perceived performance of governments, with the share of individuals rating performance well lower in the last survey.

Data Sources

The analysis is based on the last two waves from the Afrobarometer, a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, the economy, and society. The sampling universe normally includes all citizens ages 18 and older. Samples usually include either 1,200 or 2,400 cases. The sample design is a clustered, stratified, multi-stage, area probability sample according to the main subnational unit of government (state, province, region, etc.) and by urban or rural location. Wave 8 ended in 2022, and datasets for wave 9 are starting to become available. The analysis is however based on wave 8 because data for that wave are available for a larger number of countries.

Popular Support for Investments in Youth and Priority Areas

Because this is a data brief, the focus is on providing estimates with limited commentary. Table 1 provides estimates of support among respondents for higher government taxation in order to invest in youth and priority areas for investments. Comparisons are provided by gender and by age group. Individuals can strongly oppose, somewhat oppose, neither support nor oppose, somewhat support, or strongly support higher taxes for investments in youth. More than half of the respondents state that they would support higher government taxation for investments in youth, with youth themselves slightly more likely to say so. In terms of priorities for investments, the potential priorities listed in the questionnaire are job creation, education, job training, business loans, social services (health, drugs), and a category for individuals that state that the Government should not spend for those areas. Employment (job creation) tends to be the top priority, followed by education, while social services rank lower. Very few respondents state that the Government should not spend.

Table 1: Willingness to Pay Taxes and Priorities for Investments in Youth, by Age (Wave 8)

	Youth (15-35)			Older (over 35)			All		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Willingness to pay taxes									
Strongly oppose	20.7	17.1	18.8	22.2	20.3	21.4	21.1	17.7	19.4
Somewhat oppose	15.1	14.4	14.7	14.6	14.2	14.4	15.0	14.4	14.7
Neither support nor oppose	4.3	5.1	4.7	5.3	5.4	5.3	4.5	5.2	4.9
Somewhat support	23.1	25.2	24.2	22.2	25.2	23.4	22.9	25.2	24.0
Strongly support	34.7	34.6	34.7	32.5	31.6	32.1	34.1	34.0	34.0
It depends (e.g., on size of increase)	1.9	2.9	2.4	2.8	2.6	2.7	2.2	2.8	2.5
Refused to answer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Don't know/missing	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Priorities for investment									
Job creation	50.5	45.9	48.1	49.1	48.6	48.9	50.1	46.4	48.3
Education	19.9	22.0	21.0	21.0	20.5	20.8	20.2	21.7	21.0
Jobs training	13.1	11.6	12.3	13.8	10.6	12.5	13.3	11.4	12.4
Business loans	10.7	13.8	12.3	10.3	11.9	11.0	10.6	13.4	12.0
Social services (health, drugs)	4.3	5.2	4.8	4.2	6.8	5.2	4.3	5.6	4.9
Government should not spend	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.6
None of those listed/other	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5
Refused to answer	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
Don't know/missing	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Estimates by the authors using Afrobarometer data.

Government Performance by Sector

Table 2 provides respondents' perception of the Government's performance in a range of sectors. The share of respondents stating that the Government is performing fairly well or very well is provided. These shares tend to be low, although they are higher for basic services than for issues related to jobs and the economy. Table 3 indicates that there has been a decline in recent years (between waves 7 and 8 of the Afrobarometer) in the perceived performance of the government, with the share of individuals rating performance well lower in the last survey.

Table 2: Government Performance (Share Fairly Well or Very Well), by Age (Wave 8)

	Youth (15-35)			Older (over 35)			Zambia		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Managing the economy	34.2	31.8	33.0	36.1	32.2	34.5	34.8	31.9	33.4
Improving living standards of poor	23.8	24.1	23.9	26.5	22.3	24.8	24.6	23.7	24.1
Creating jobs	22.1	21.4	21.8	22.1	21.1	21.7	22.1	21.4	21.8
Keeping prices stable	21.9	21.4	21.6	24.8	20.4	23.0	22.7	21.2	21.9
Narrowing gaps between rich & poor	18.6	18.5	18.5	21.4	17.1	19.6	19.4	18.2	18.8
Reducing crime	41.0	40.0	40.5	39.2	38.7	39.0	40.5	39.7	40.1
Improving basic health services	41.4	41.6	41.5	41.5	39.2	40.6	41.4	41.1	41.3
Addressing educational needs	44.6	45.0	44.8	41.9	45.5	43.3	43.8	45.1	44.4
Providing water & sanitation services	38.1	38.7	38.4	38.0	37.4	37.7	38.1	38.5	38.3
Fighting corruption in government	31.4	30.8	31.1	30.8	28.6	29.9	31.2	30.4	30.8
Maintaining roads and bridges	43.2	43.9	43.6	41.2	43.5	42.1	42.6	43.8	43.2
Providing reliable electricity supply	43.8	43.3	43.5	40.8	41.6	41.1	42.9	43.0	42.9
Preventing/resolving violent conflict	46.1	44.6	45.3	44.0	41.7	43.0	45.5	44.0	44.8
Addressing needs of young people	24.9	25.6	25.3	27.3	24.9	26.3	25.6	25.4	25.5
Protecting rights/disabled people	37.6	37.1	37.3	37.0	33.7	35.6	37.4	36.4	36.9

Source: Estimates by the authors using Afrobarometer data.

Table 3: Change in Performance Over Time (Share Fairly Well or Very Well)

	Wave 7			Wave 8			Difference		
	Youth	Older	Total	Youth	Older	Total	Youth	Older	Total
Managing the economy	39.2	41.3	39.6	33.0	34.5	33.4	-6.3	-6.8	-6.3
Improving living standards of poor	28.8	29.8	29.0	23.9	24.8	24.1	-4.9	-5.0	-4.8
Creating jobs	26.6	25.2	26.3	21.8	21.7	21.8	-4.8	-3.5	-4.5
Keeping prices stable	25.7	26.9	25.9	21.6	23.0	21.9	-4.1	-3.9	-4.0
Narrowing gaps between rich & poor	22.2	22.6	22.3	18.5	19.6	18.8	-3.7	-3.0	-3.5
Reducing crime	51.6	50.1	51.3	40.5	39.0	40.1	-11.1	-11.1	-11.2
Improving basic health services	52.2	51.3	52.1	41.5	40.6	41.3	-10.8	-10.7	-10.8
Addressing educational needs	55.2	53.7	54.9	44.8	43.3	44.4	-10.4	-10.3	-10.5
Providing water & sanitation services	43.8	43.3	43.7	38.4	37.7	38.3	-5.4	-5.6	-5.5
Fighting corruption in government	40.3	37.5	39.8	31.1	29.9	30.8	-9.2	-7.6	-8.9
Maintaining roads and bridges	49.7	46.6	49.1	43.6	42.1	43.2	-6.1	-4.4	-5.9
Providing reliable electricity supply	44.1	39.7	43.3	43.5	41.1	42.9	-0.5	1.5	-0.3
Preventing/resolving violent conflict	60.6	60.6	60.6	45.3	43.0	44.8	-15.3	-17.6	-15.8
Addressing needs of young people	36.1	35.8	36.0	25.3	26.3	25.5	-10.9	-9.5	-10.5
Protecting rights/disabled people	46.0	45.2	45.9	37.3	35.6	36.9	-8.7	-9.6	-9.0

Source: Estimates by the authors using Afrobarometer data.

Takeaways

Using data from waves 7 and 8 of the Afrobarometer, this brief assesses the extent of popular support for investing in youth, priority interventions to do so, and perceptions of Government performance. More than half of respondents would be willing to support higher government taxes to invest in youth, with employment (job creation) coming as the top priority followed by education. Ratings of government performance in many sectors are however low, and declining. This suggests the need for improvements to ensure that youth have the opportunities they need and deserve.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment: The analysis in this brief is that of the authors only and need not reflect the views of UNESCO, its Board, or the countries they represent, nor do they necessarily represent the views of the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa or its Governing Board.