

Views of Namibia's economy darken sharply; youth more likely to consider emigration

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 202 | Maximilian Weylandt

Summary

In the past two years, Namibia's economy has struggled. In 2016, the country saw two consecutive quarters of negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth, officially plunging it into a depression, followed by the first year since 1993 to record a decline in the GDP, by 0.8% in 2017 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2018). At the same time, unemployment among youth,¹ who make up almost 40% of the population, increased to 43.4% in 2016, up from 39.2% in 2014 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2015, 2017).

Citizens' perceptions tell a similar story: According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey, the share of Namibians who think the economy is doing poorly is at a historic high, triple the proportion in 2014, and almost two-thirds say the government is doing a bad job of managing the economy. Yet more than half describe their personal living conditions as good, and a majority expect things to get better over the coming year.

Even though youth tend to rate their own living conditions more favourably than their older counterparts, they are particularly critical of the government's economic management. They are also more likely than their elders to be thinking about moving to another country. Economic considerations feature heavily in these thoughts: By far the most common reason for considering emigration is to find work.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Namibia, led by the Institute for Public Policy Research, interviewed 1,200 adult Namibians between 5 and 27 November 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Namibia in 1999, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

- The share of Namibians who rate the country's economic condition as "fairly good" or "very good" has dropped from 74% in 2014 to 41%.

¹ This dispatch uses the Namibia Statistics Agency's definition of youth for the purposes of calculating the youth unemployment rate, i.e. people aged 15-34. Since Afrobarometer data are collected from citizens aged 18 or older, we report on youth aged 18-34.

- About half (52%) of Namibians describe their personal living conditions as “fairly good” or “very good.”
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of Namibians say their government is performing “fairly badly” or “very badly” in managing the economy.
- Youth are somewhat more likely than their elders to see their living conditions as good (55% vs. 48%), but they are less likely to approve of the government’s performance on the economy (31% vs. 40%).
- One in five Namibians (22%) have given at least “a little” thought to emigrating. Youth are more likely than their elders to think about moving to another country (27% vs. 17%). Namibians’ reasons for considering emigration are predominantly tied to economic issues.

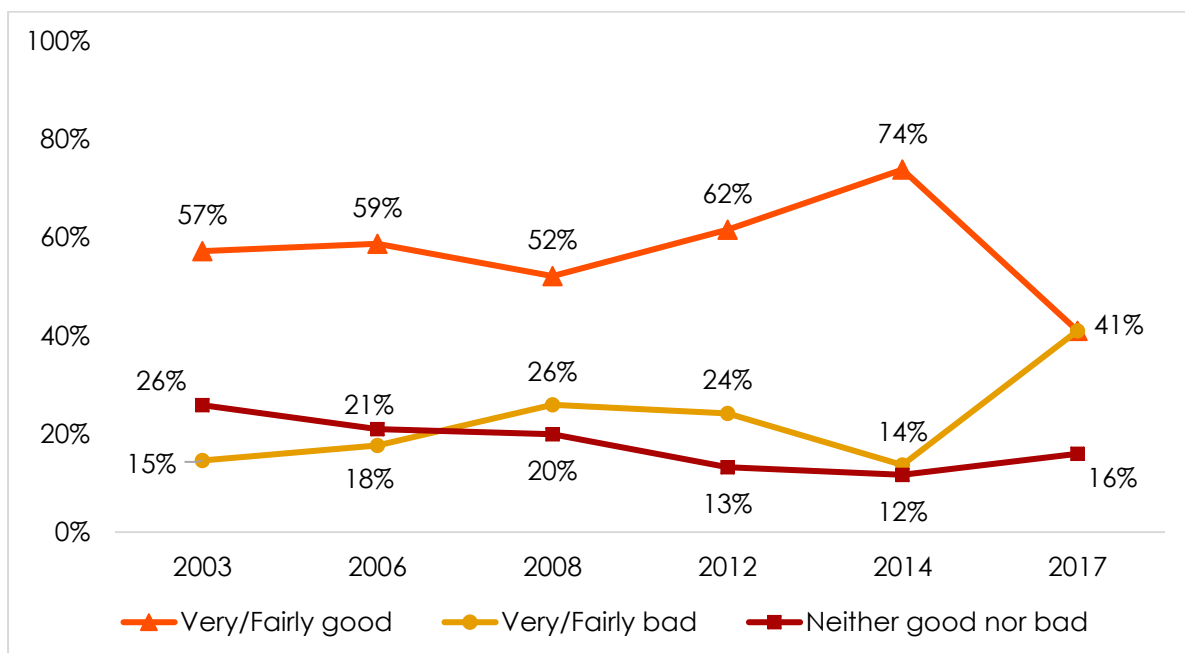
Dramatic downturn in views on Namibia’s economic condition

Since the second round of the Afrobarometer survey in Namibia in 2003, respondents have been asked how they would describe “the present economic condition of this country.” In the preceding five rounds, Namibians who thought the state of the economy was “fairly good” or “very good” always far outnumbered those who considered it “fairly bad” or “very bad.”

As of November 2017, however, negative assessments of the economy stand at a record high, tied at 41% with positive evaluations (Figure 1). Compared to the 2014 survey, the proportion of citizens who describe the economy as “fairly bad” or “very bad” has almost tripled, while the share who say it is fairly/very good has dropped by 33 percentage points.

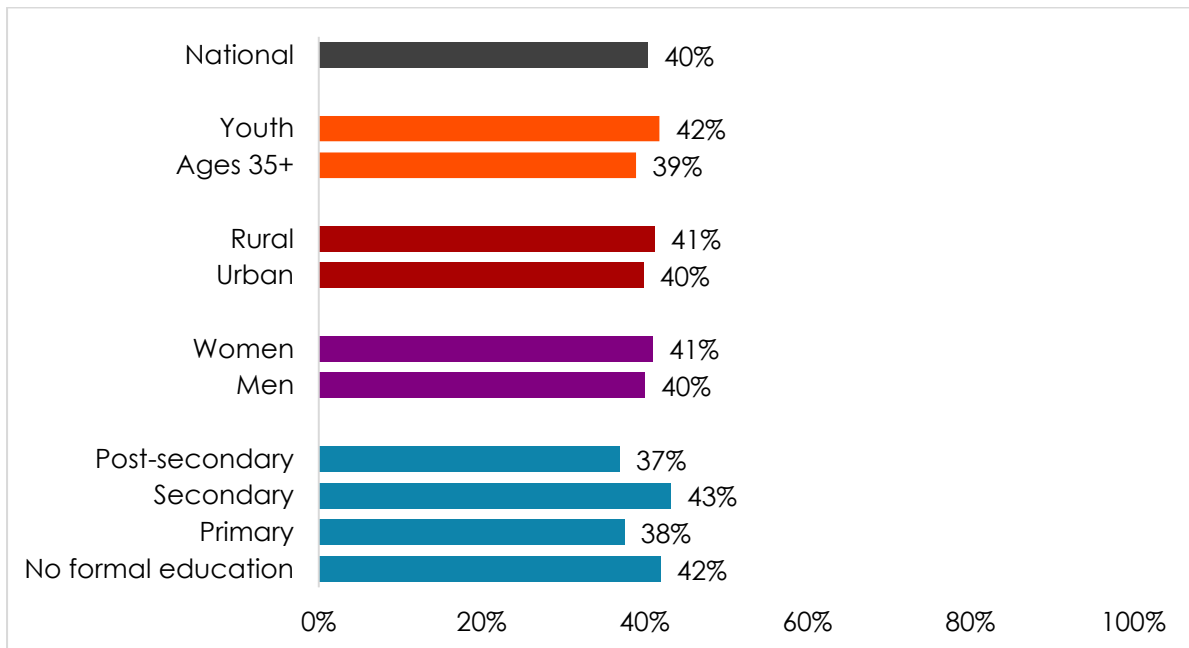
This pattern holds across key demographic groups, with little difference by gender, age, area of residence, or educational level (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Country’s economic condition | Namibia | 2003-2017



Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?*

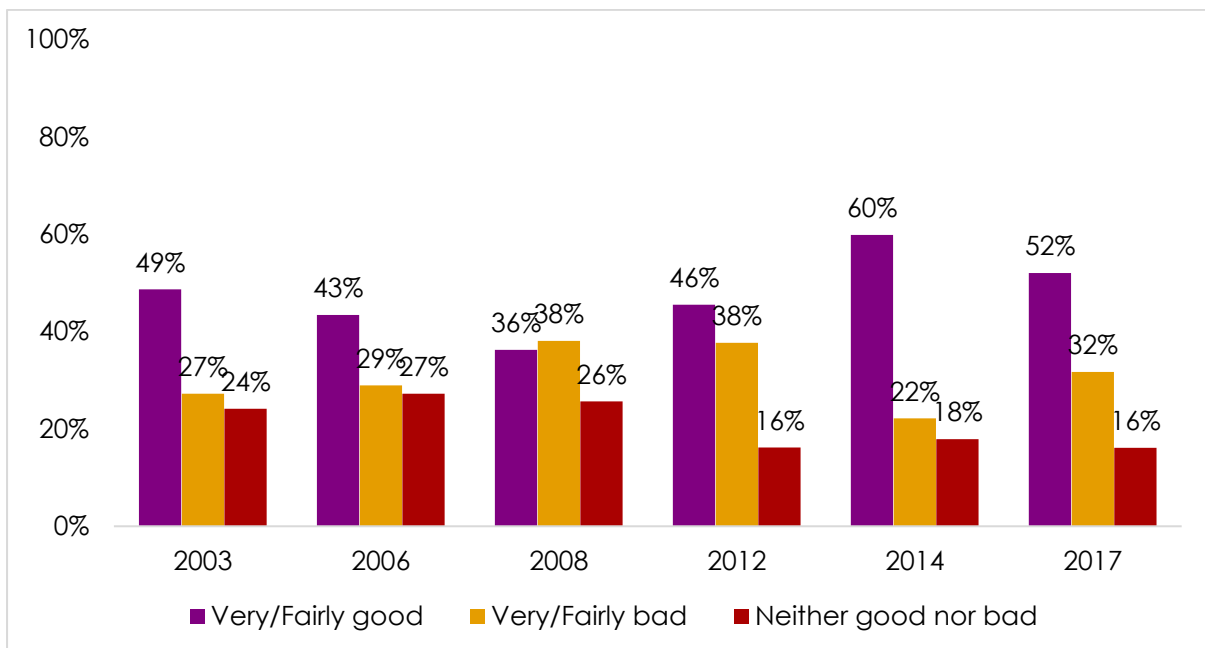
Figure 2: Perception of country's economic condition as good | by demographic group | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe the present condition of this country? (% who say "fairly good" or "very good")

A slight majority (52%) of Namibians consider their own living conditions "fairly good" or "very good" – a decrease from 60% in the 2014 survey (Figure 3). The share of Namibians who rate their living conditions as "fairly bad" or "very bad" has increased by 10 percentage points since the previous survey.

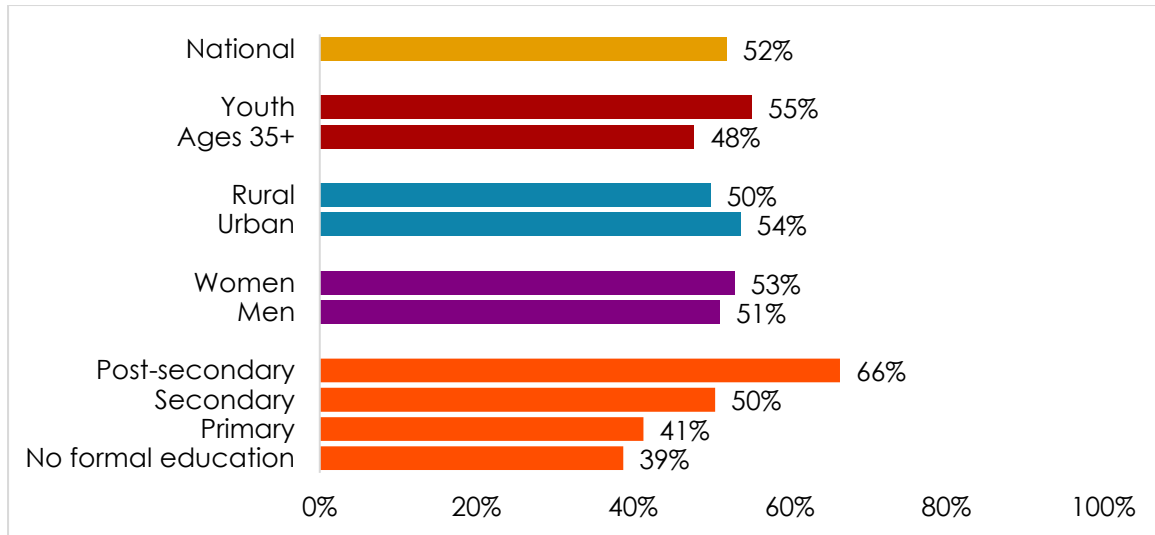
Figure 3: Own living conditions | Namibia | 2003-2017



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?

A closer look at the 2017 survey reveals that youth are somewhat more likely than their elders (55% vs. 48%) to describe their living situation as good, as are urbanites compared to rural residents (54% vs. 50%) (Figure 4). Two-thirds (66%) of citizens with a post-secondary education see their living conditions as good, while only about four in 10 of those with a primary education or without formal education say the same.

Figure 4: Good personal living conditions | by demographic group | Namibia | 2017

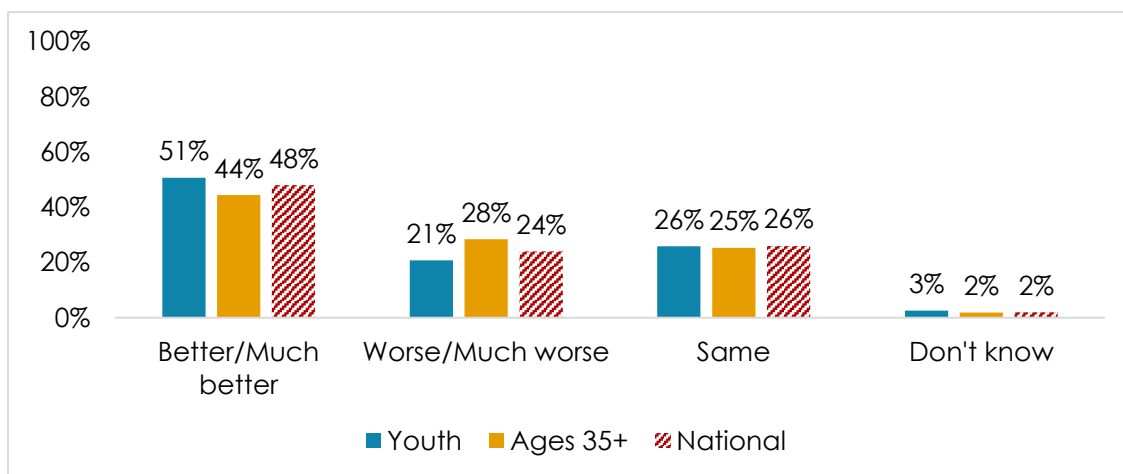


Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions? (% who say "fairly good" or "very good")

Comparing their own living conditions to those of other Namibians, 48% say they are "better" or "much better" off than their compatriots, while 24% say their living conditions are "worse" or "much worse" (Figure 5). About one in four (26%) say their living conditions are the same as those of other Namibians.

Here, too, youth have a somewhat more positive perspective than their elders: 51% say their living conditions are better, vs. 44% of respondents aged 35 or older.

Figure 5: Personal living conditions compared to others | youth vs. ages 35+ | Namibia | 2017

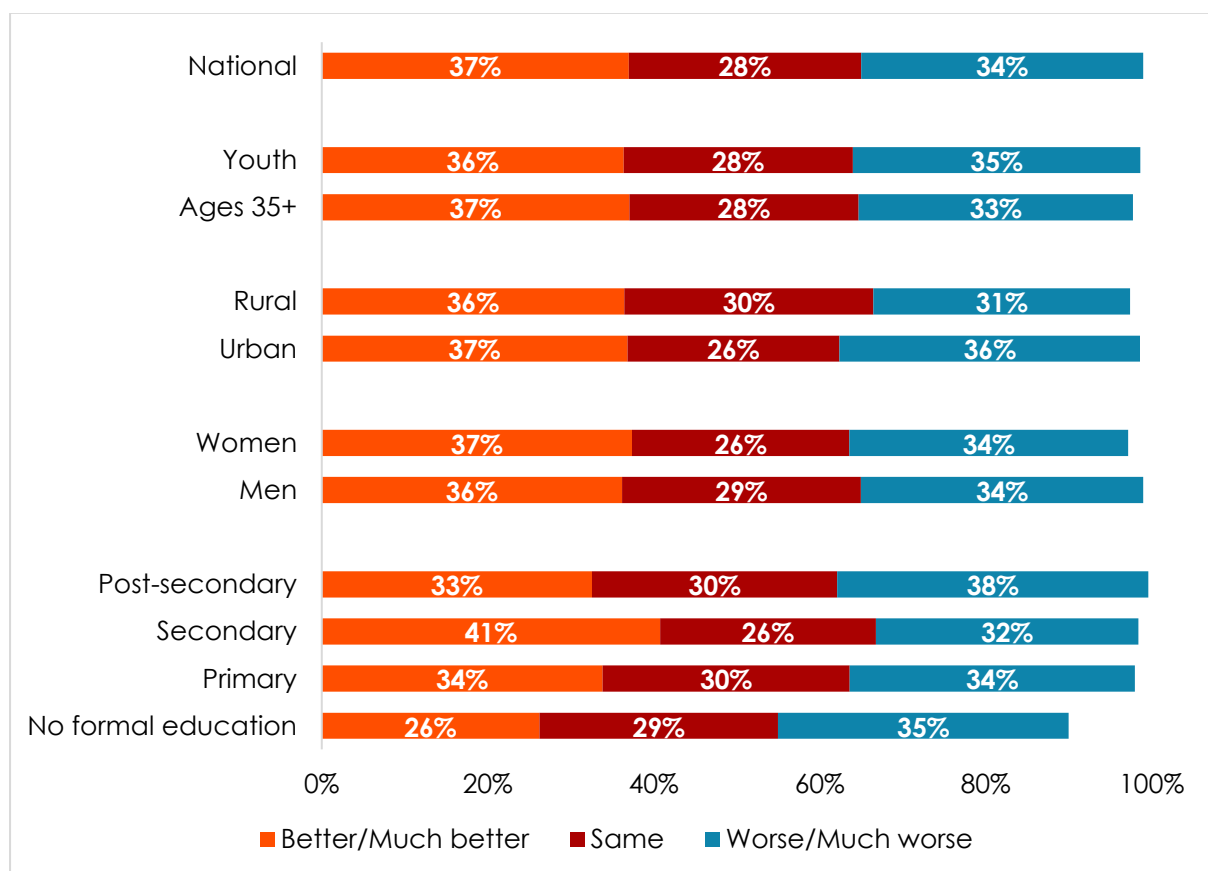


Respondents were asked: In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other Namibians?

Namibians are about evenly divided as to whether the economy has improved or deteriorated over the past year: 37% say it's gotten "better" or "much better," while 34% say it's gotten "worse" or "much worse" (Figure 6). Almost as many (28%) say things are about the same as a year earlier.

These assessments are remarkably similar across key demographic groups. Urban residents are slightly more likely than their rural counterparts to say the economy has worsened over the past 12 months (36% vs. 31%), perhaps reflecting the decline of the construction industry, which would have been felt more heavily in urban areas (Brown & Emvula, 2018). And respondents with no formal education are least likely to see any improvement (26%).

Figure 6: Country's economy compared to 12 months ago | by demographic group | Namibia | 2017

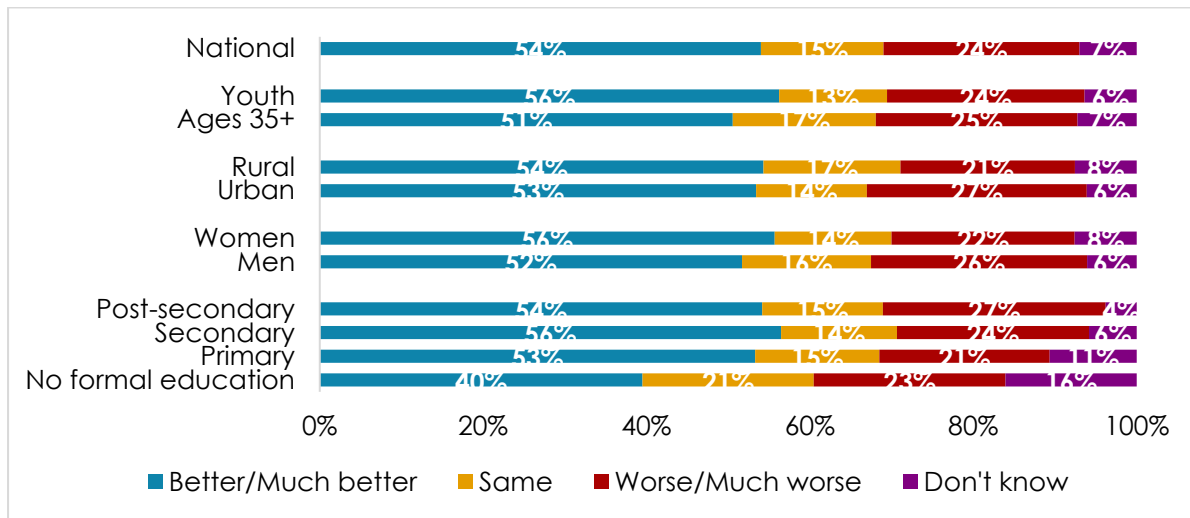


Respondents were asked: Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago?

But Namibians are considerably more optimistic in their outlook for the coming year. When asked, "Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?," a majority (54%) say they think things will be "better" or "much better." Only one in four (24%) think things will be worse, while 15% predict they will be the same, and 7% say they "don't know" (Figure 7).

Youth are somewhat more optimistic than their elders (56% vs. 51% who expect the economy to improve), as are women compared to men (56% vs. 52%). Among citizens with no formal education, only 40% think things will get better over the coming year.

Figure 7: Country's economy in 12 months' time | by demographic group | Namibia | 2017

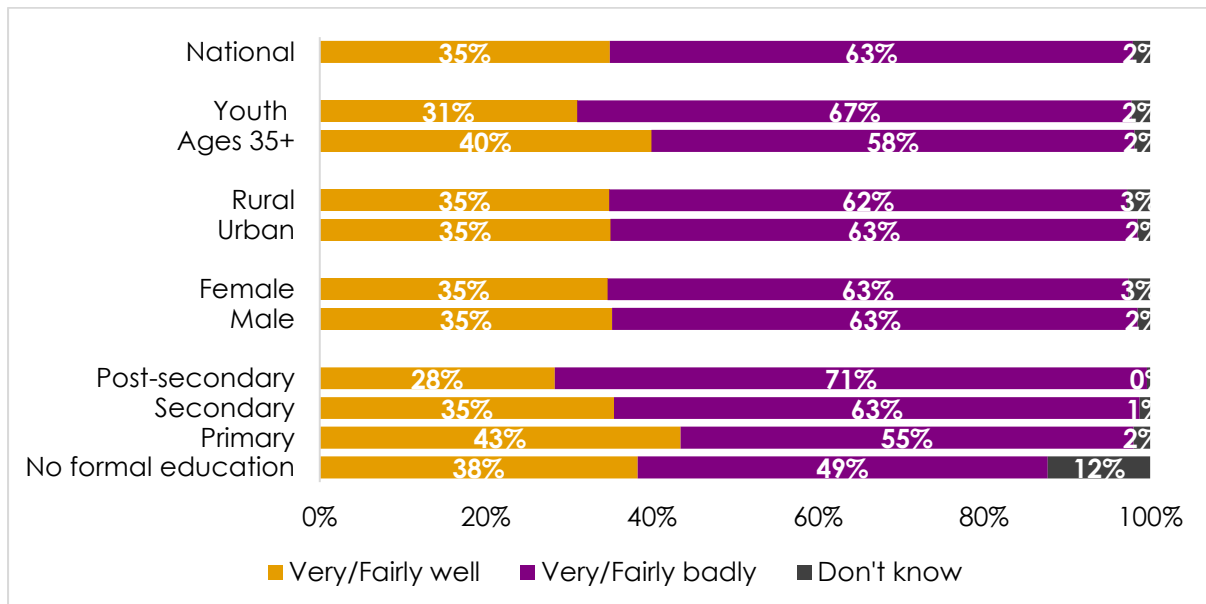


Respondents were asked: Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

But only about one in three Namibians (35%) think the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in managing the economy (Figure 8). Almost two-thirds (63%) think the opposite, including 35% who say the government is doing "very badly."

Youth are particularly critical of the government's performance: Only 31% say it is doing well, compared to 40% of those aged 35 or older. Citizens with a post-secondary education are least likely to praise the government's efforts (28%).

Figure 8: Government performance in managing the economy | by demographic group | Namibia | 2017



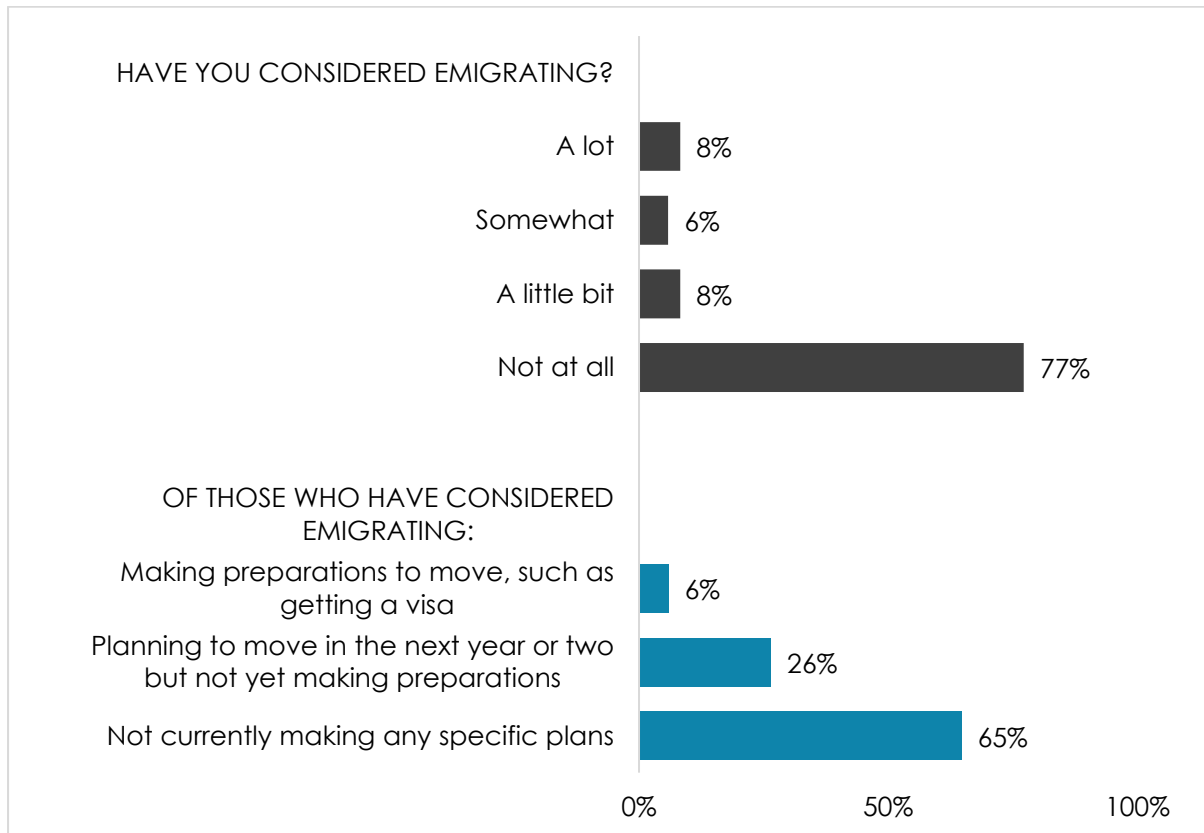
Respondents were asked: Now let's speak about the performance of the present government of this country. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Managing the economy?

Leaving for greener pastures?

Given the economic headwinds of the last few years, and Namibians' negative perceptions of government performance on the economy, it is perhaps no surprise that a substantial number of Namibians (22%) have considered emigration at least "a little bit," including 8% who say they've considered it "a lot" (Figure 9).

Among those who have considered leaving for another country, 6% say they are making concrete preparation to leave, such as getting a visa, while 26% say they are planning to move within the next year or two but are not yet making specific preparations.

Figure 9: Emigration plans | Namibia | 2017



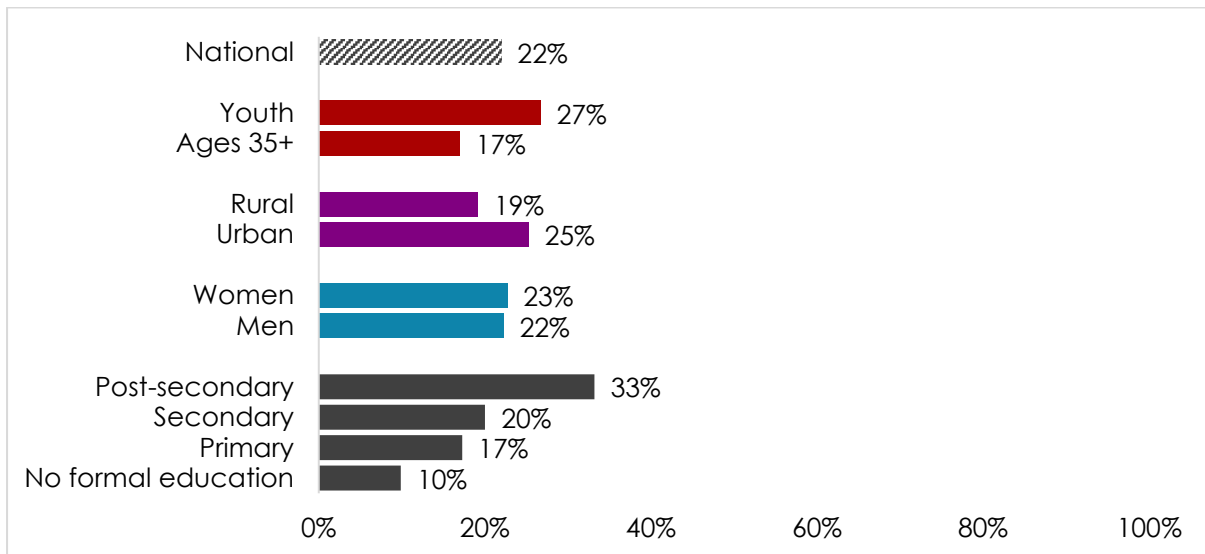
Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?
Respondents who say they have considered emigration "a little bit," "somewhat," or "a lot" were asked: How much planning or preparation have you done in order to move to another country to live?

Here we see significant differences between youth and Namibians older than 34: 27% of young Namibians say they have thought at least "a little bit" about moving to another country, compared to 17% of Namibians above age 34. Urban and better-educated respondents are more likely to have considered emigration than their rural and less-educated counterparts (Figure 10).

Among respondents who have considered emigration, those aged 35 or older are more likely to be making preparations than youth, as are those with post-secondary education compared to those with lower levels of education (Figure 11).

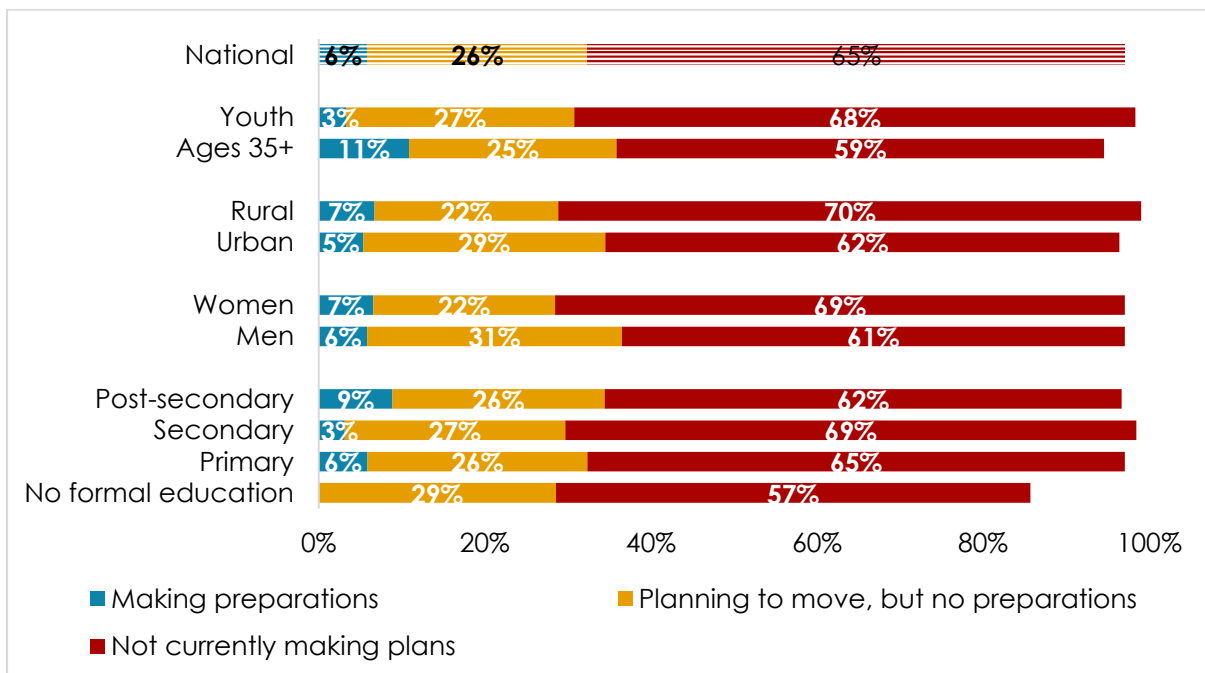
Among respondents who specified the country or region to which they are most likely to emigrate, 36% name South Africa while 18% express a preference for Europe.

Figure 10: Considering emigration at least a little | by demographic group
 | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? (% who say "a little bit," "somewhat," or "a lot")

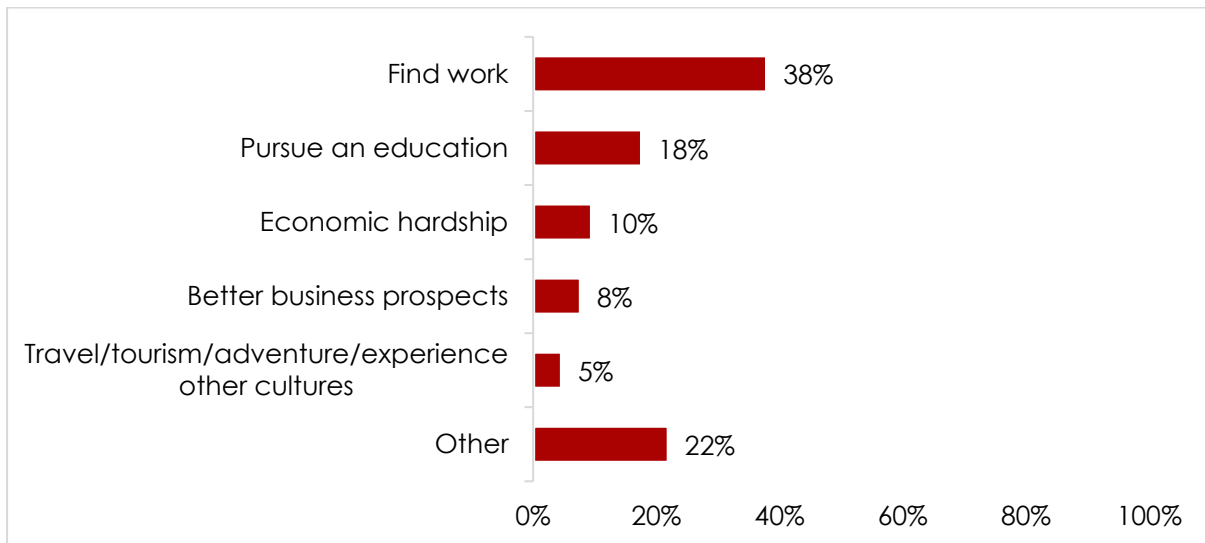
Figure 11: Emigration preparations | by demographic group | Namibia | 2017



Respondents who say they have considered emigration were asked: How much planning or preparation have you done in order to move to another country to live? (Note: Respondents who say they have not considered moving to another country are excluded.)

Respondents' reasons for considering emigration confirm the central role of the country's economic problems. Among those who say they have considered leaving the country, the most common reason is to find work (cited by 38%), while about one in 10 cite economic hardship (10%) or better business prospects (8%) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Most important reasons for considering emigration | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: *There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Namibia?*

Conclusion

Citizens' perceptions confirm Namibia's economic struggles during its first recession in two decades. The share of Namibians who think the economy is doing well has dropped sharply, and a majority of respondents disapprove of the government's economic management. Still, more than half of Namibians describe their living conditions as good and think the economy will improve going forward. But a substantial proportion of Namibians – especially young and better-educated Namibians – have considered emigrating, most commonly due to economic problems.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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