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## **In Search of Democrats: Youth Attitudes Towards Democracy and Non-democratic Alternatives**

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The IPPR Youth and Politics Survey 2000 explored the extent to which young Namibians show preference and support for democracy over non-democratic alternatives. In this paper, we search for a better understanding of who shows a clear and strong preference for democracy and, at the same time, rejects alternative forms of government. Cluster analysis is used to distinguish those who prefer democracy from those who do not. The two clusters are based on three dimensions: preference for non-democratic alternatives, willingness to defend democracy, and preference for a strong president who does not have to bother with elections. The final section of the paper describes the composition of each of these clusters by means of biographical and attitudinal variables. It concludes that a significant proportion of especially the rural youth (at this point in time at least) do not believe that democracy is always best. Given the fact that the majority of young voters reside in these areas, our findings suggest that consolidated democracy is still some time away.

### **1. Introduction**

The IPPR in collaboration with Research Facilitation Services (RFS) conducted a sample-based household survey among Namibians aged 18 to 32 years. A total of 1,200 face-to-face interviews were conducted at the respondents' places of residence. The sample was stratified by gender and area of residence (urban / rural). Included in the final analysis were 1,199 cases.

This Briefing Paper reports on the section of the survey that dealt with attitudes towards democracy. It analyses responses to questions that measured support for democracy. By means of factor analysis and cluster analysis, it tries to identify different clusters (or groups) among the respondents based on their responses to three related dimensions (or factors) of preference for democracy.

### **2. Preference for democracy**

Current thinking about the consolidation of democracy emphasises the importance of attitudinal aspects for the consolidation of democracy (Rose et.al. 1998; Linz and Stepan 1997). Linz and Stepan (1997:15) argue that:

“ [...] by a ‘consolidated democracy’ we mean a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in a phrase, ‘*the only game in town*’” (emphasis added).

Attitudinally, democracy becomes the ‘only game in town’, when even in the face of severe crises, political change is managed by means of democratic procedures. Rose et.al. (1998:24) concur by arguing that democracy as the preferred regime type is in constant competition with non-democratic ones (in societies that have recently emerged from an authoritarian dispensation) and that democracy will only survive if it is seen as the lesser of all evils (the so-called Churchill hypothesis).

Although there is a lot more to consolidation than the attitudinal aspect, it is only this often-ignored aspect that is of interest to us here. We extracted from the Youth and Politics 2000 questionnaire a number of variables (or questions) on preference for democracy for our analysis. These variables are displayed in Table 1 below.

**Table1: Variables for Factor Analysis**

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>SCALE</b>
Approval of non-democratic alternatives*	4 – Point
Willingness to defend democracy (Opposition to actions by government to reduce democracy)**	4 – Point
Preference for strong leader***	4 – Point

\* “Our current system of governing with regular elections and more than one political party is not the only one Namibia has ever had. Some people say that we would be better off if we had a different system of government. How would you feel about the following?” a) A system where all decisions are made by a council of traditional leaders; b) a system that allows only one party or one candidate to stand for elections; c) a system where the military rule the country; d) a system where parliament and political parties are abolished and everything is decided by the president; e) a system in which all the important decisions on the economy are made by economic experts.

\*\* “If the government were to take the following actions, would you support it, neither support nor oppose, or oppose it?” a) shut down radio and TV stations and news papers that are critical of the government; b) dismiss judges that are make rulings against the government; c) ban political parties; d) suspend parliament and cancel the next elections.

\*\*\* “Sometimes democracy does not work. When this happens, some people say that we need a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections. Others say that even when things don’t work, democracy is always best. What do you think? ”

These variables were subjected to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and were found to be suitable for Factor Analysis.<sup>1</sup> Although the questionnaire included more questions that were at least theoretically suited to be included in this analysis, our tests found them to be statistically unsuitable for our analysis. Our Factor Analysis (set to extract Eigen values >1) suggests the extraction of three factors. This three-factor solution explains approximately 61.5% of the variance in the variables included. The three factors and their scores are presented in Table 2 below.



**Table 2: Dimensions of preference for democracy**

VARIABLE	FACTOR		
	1	2	3
Approve: Only one political party, one candidate	0,730		
Approve: All decision made by council of traditional leaders	0,782		
Approve: Army govern country	0,738		
Approve: Parliament & political parties abolished - President decides	0,781		
Approve: All important decisions about the economy made by economic experts	0,609		
Oppose: Shut down critical newspapers, radio, TV		0,750	
Oppose: Dismiss judges		0,765	
Oppose: Ban political parties		0,655	
Oppose: Suspend parliament, cancel next elections		0,758	
Approve: Sometimes need a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections			0,982

Note: Only the strongest factor loads for each variable is displayed, others have been suppressed.

The first factor combines high loads of all variables that were about approval of “undemocratic” alternatives to democracy. The second factor contains high loads for the four variables measuring the willingness to defend democracy. Factor three consists of the variable that expresses approval for a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections.

### *Factor 1: Preference for non-democratic alternatives*

Young democracies, such as Namibia, cannot rely on the habitual support of citizens raised in an earlier time and under a different (non-democratic) dispensation (Rose et. al. 1998:5). Democracy has not yet become ‘the only game in town’ and as a result is in constant competition with non-democratic alternatives for political hegemony. In mature democracies that situation is quite different. The fact that democracy has attained political hegemony means that there is no popular demand to transform the democratic dispensation (to an undemocratic one) and that politicians cannot propose non-democratic alternatives without ‘committing electoral suicide’ (Rose et. al. 1998:5). As a result, there is no demand or supply for a regime type other than a democratic one.

To assess the extent to which there is a demand for non-democratic alternatives, the Namibian youth were asked to indicate their preferences for five alternative forms of government. These are: one party rule; rule by traditional leadership; exclusive presidential rule; military rule; and technocratic rule. These have two things in common: none of them appoint or remove leaders by means of popular elections and none of them require regular popular inputs from ordinary citizens.



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The fact that they load together on the same factor suggests that the youth have a common understanding of them, i.e. they are all non-democratic forms of government.

*Factor 2: Willingness to defend democracy*

The willingness to defend democracy presupposes a preference for democracy. As such it represents a rejection of non-democratic alternatives. But it also assumes more than just a preference for democracy. In the first instance it requires opposition to whomever might suggest whatever form of non-democratic alternative, and it indicates the willingness to take some action to show such opposition. For this paper we are less interested in *what* actions young Namibians are willing to take than the fact that they are *willing* to take them. Thus, we assume that the willingness to take action to defend democracy represents to some extent at least an indicator of the level of commitment to democracy. Citizens who are willing to defend democracy will be unlikely to support or follow leaders who take action to reduce the quality of democracy.

*Factor 3: Preference for strong leader*

Democracies are not only under threat from military coups. Democracy can also come under attack from elected presidents who use their popular support base to undermine the democratic regime. There are several examples to choose from: President Mugabe of Zimbabwe, President Fujimori of Peru and President Chavez of Venezuela are all examples of popularly elected presidents who converted democratic dispensations into regime types best described as ‘civilian authoritarianism’. Such systems are usually characterised by: attempts to extend the presidential term in office beyond its constitutional limit; complete or near complete presidential control over the legislature and the judiciary often by means of patronage and personal loyalty; rule by presidential decree; attempts to manipulate elections and fabricate results; and a clamp-down (usually with the help of police and military forces) on those regarded as ‘enemies of the state’. Human rights abuses show a sharp increase and the strong leader rejects ‘foreign interventions’ and internal criticism. Those who prefer a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections thus support civil authoritarianism and not democracy.

### 3. Clusters of preference for democracy

An initial hierarchical cluster analysis of a randomly selected 15% of all cases suggests a 2-cluster solution.<sup>2</sup> Table 3 below shows the solution derived from the follow-up K-means cluster analysis (with all 1,199 cases):

**Table 3: Factor scores by cluster**

FACTORS	CLUSTERS	
	1	2
Preference for non-democratic alternatives	-0,26	0,29
Willingness to defend democracy	0,74	-0,81
Preference for strong leader	-0,13	0,14

The cluster analysis renders two groups (or clusters) with clear differences on all three factors. This suggests that the groups are quite clearly opposites when it comes to their preference for



democracy. Cluster 1 scores above average on ‘the willingness to defend democracy’ factor and scores below average on the remaining two factors. Cluster 2 scores above average on the ‘preference for a non-democratic alternative’ factor as well as the ‘preference for a strong leader’ factor and scores below average on the ‘willingness to defend democracy’ factor. Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 are thus opposites. Based on the results of the cluster analysis Cluster 1 will be considered “*Democrats*” whilst Cluster 2 will be considered the “*Non-democrats*”.<sup>3</sup> Table 4 shows the distribution of the two clusters across the thirteen political and administrative regions.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 4: Democrats and Non-democrats by region**

	<b>DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>NON-DEMOCRATS</b>
Caprivi	61,5%	38,5%
Erongo	72,4%	27,6%
Hardap	58,3%	41,7%
Karas	33,3%	66,7%
Kavango	84,6%	15,4%
Khomas	70,7%	29,3%
Kunene	40,6%	59,4%
Ohangwena	27,1%	72,9%
Omaheke	73,3%	26,7%
Omusati	26,2%	73,8%
Oshana	41,9%	58,1%
Oshikoto	38,1%	61,9%
Otjondjupa	64,3%	35,7%
<b>Average</b>	<b>52.0%</b>	<b>48.0%</b>

Democrats are the minority in six out of the thirteen regions: Karas (33.3%), Kunene (40.6%), Ohangwena (27.1%), Omusati (26.2%), Oshana (41.9%) and Oshikoto (38.1%). Democrats are a strong majority in at least six regions: Caprivi (61%), Erongo (72.4%), Kavango (84.6%), Khomas (70.7%), Omaheke (73.3%) and Otjondjupa (64.3%). In Hardap the majority of Democrats is much smaller than in the other regions. Overall, there are only slightly more Democrats (52%) than Non-democrats (48%) among the youth across all regions in the country.<sup>5</sup>

In order to contextualise our findings we have to introduce a number of socio-biographical variables into the analysis. These variables would allow us to assess the impact of social structures on young people’s preference for democracy. The first variable is the urban/rural divide. Table 5 shows that the majority of the urban youth (69%) are Democrats whilst the majority of rural youth are Non-democrats.

**Table 5: Democrats and Non-democrats by urban/rural divide**

	<b>DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>NON-DEMOCRATS</b>
Urban	69%	31%
Rural	43%	57%
<b>Average</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>48%</b>

This finding suggests that urbanisation is ‘good’ for democracy. It also suggests that regional scores are likely to be the product of their levels of urbanisation. Regions with low levels of urbanisation are likely to host more Non-democrats than regions with higher levels of urbanisation



(and *vice versa*). One possible reason for this is the fact that urban people are likely to have more, direct contact with the workings of democracy (beyond elections that is) and on a more regular basis. Urban dwellers, for example, have more opportunities to participate in civil society simply because there are more of these organisations in urban areas than in rural areas. As a result, they have a better chance of presenting and protecting their interests and engaging elected representatives, especially at the very local level.

Urban dwellers also have more access to information especially through the print and electronic media than their rural counterparts. This means that they have more opportunities to be informed than those who do not have regular access to the media. Finally, urban dwellers are more likely to learn about and experience democracy. They are better integrated into the formal economy and markets, and hence, more exposed to the economic consequences of political decisions than their rural counterparts. One could even argue that urbanisation is a process of modernisation and that preference for democracy is one of the consequences of this process. Urbanisation is likely to expose citizens to new lifestyles, new issues and new ways of conducting their daily business and all these increase exposure to the institutions and processes of the formal political system. Hence, the citizens in the urban areas are more likely to understand the system better, have more experience with it, and have a better chance to obtain benefits from it. Rural citizens on the other hand, are more inclined toward ‘traditionalism’, have fewer opportunities to benefit from the democratic system and have less understanding and experience with it.

It is, however, unlikely that one variable can explain our entire general finding. The second variable that is introduced here is that of language group. Those who prefer a more cultural explanation of democracy and its consolidation often use (and not without problems) ‘language group’ as a proxy variable for ethnic group. Such analysts would argue that democracy requires a type of integrated, ‘modern’ value system that would, to some degree or another, be in conflict with the existing fragmented ‘traditional’ value system(s) in young democracies. For them ethnicity is important because of their stronger focus on groups and their cultural artefacts.

We put this type of argument to the test in Table 6.<sup>6</sup> Table 6 shows that the majority of Oshiwambo-respondents forms part of the Non-democrats cluster, whereas the remaining groups all have the majority of their cases in the Democrats cluster.

**Table 6: Democrats and Non-democrats by language group**

	DEMOCRATS	NON-DEMOCRATS
Oshiwambo	39,4%	60,6%
Kavango	76,7%	23,3%
Afrikaans	67,6%	32,4%
Herero	67,2%	32,8%
Damara	59,3%	40,7%
Caprivian	64,8%	35,2%
<b>Average</b>	<b>51,9%</b>	<b>48,1%</b>

Note: Due to small numbers that do not qualify for interpretation, Setswana (n=1), German (n=1), English (n=6), Nama (n=14) and “Other African Languages” (n=9) are not included in the table. For this reason the total does not conform to those in earlier tables.

On face value this appears to confirm, at least some part of, the cultural thesis as here is one ethnic group that shows a disposition unlike those of other groups. Are we correct if we ascribe this to culture, or is there some other explanation that is masked as culture? If we look at the regional breakdown of Democrats and Non-democrats, we see that it to some degree confirms the



results by language groups. If we keep in mind that two of the four north-central regions are without any significant urban areas and that the remaining two have relatively few urban centres, is the result by language group not merely a confirmation of the urban/rural gap? This is quite possible given that most Oshiwambo speakers reside in rural areas. Table 7 shows the dispersion of Democrats and Non-democrats controlling for the urban/rural divide.

In urban areas, and for all language groups, democrats are in the majority. In fact, in each language group, Democrats outweigh Non-democrats by about two-to-one (62% vs. 38%). This means that the cultural argument is not well supported – in urban areas two-thirds of Oshiwambo-speakers are part of the Democrats cluster. Although most other language groups have more urban Democrats, the differences between the group-scores are too small to maintain a comprehensive cultural explanation.

**Table 7: Democrats and Non-democrats by language group and urban area**

	DEMOCRATS	NON-DEMOCRATS
Oshiwambo	62%	38%
Kavango	75%	25%
Afrikaans	73%	27%
Herero	77%	23%
Damara	61%	39%
Caprivian	83%	17%
<b>Average Urban</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Note: Other languages not shown due to small number of cases.

The picture for the rural areas looks quite different, however. According to Table 8, in rural areas, only a minority (32%) of Oshiwambo-speakers are part of the Democrats cluster. This is unlike the other groups where in each case the majority are part of the Democrats cluster. Does this mean that a cultural explanation is in order in rural areas?

**Table 8: Democrats and Non-democrats by language group and rural area**

	DEMOCRATS	NON-DEMOCRATS
Oshiwambo	32%	68%
Afrikaans	57%	43%
Herero	62%	38%
Damara	58%	42%
Caprivian	59%	41%
<b>Average Rural</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Note: Other languages not shown due to small number of cases.

A lot more analysis is needed to fully answer this question. We cannot consider all of them here. If, however, one has to consider the fact that only one group is responsible for this trend and that members of this group show a different disposition in urban areas, the explanation is unlikely to be purely a cultural one. This is one area that warrants further investigation. Even though we cannot explain the finding at this point, it still provides reason for concern because one of the largest segments of the young voting corps in Namibia forms part of the Non-democratic cluster. It suggests that there is a lack of support for democracy among young, rural Oshiwambo-speakers.



The third socio-biographical variable for our analysis here is gender. Table 9 shows that there is no significant gender gap as far as preference for democracy is concerned and that only a slight majority of both men and women form part of the Democrats cluster. This suggests that although there might be areas of gender-specific socialisation and experiences for young males and females, preference for democracy is not one of them.

**Table 9: Democrats and Non-democrats by gender**

	<b>DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>NON-DEMOCRATS</b>
Male	53,4%	46,6%
Female	50,5%	49,5%
<b>Average</b>	<b>51,9%</b>	<b>48,1%</b>

Tables 10 and 11 show the impact of two additional variables: education and household income. Table 10 contains the findings for urban areas whilst Table 11 covers rural areas. Overall (in both urban and rural areas), members of the Democrats cluster tend to be better educated than members of the Non-democrats cluster. Democrats also have higher levels of income in both urban and rural areas. This suggests that both education and income are 'good' for democracy and that with a long-term rise in education and income levels, more young Democrats are likely to appear. This is in line with conventional thinking about democracy: it requires an educated, middle class.

**Table 10: Democrats and Non-democrats by education and income by urban area**

	<b>DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>NON-DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Level of schooling completed	4,76	4,71	4,74
Household income	4,55	4,32	4,48

**Table 11: Democrats and Non-democrats by education and income by rural area**

	<b>DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>NON-DEMOCRATS</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Level of schooling completed	4,20	3,96	4,06
Household income	3,97	3,27	3,57

The more interesting findings pertain to within area differences. If we compare urban and rural areas with regard to education in income, it is clear that the gaps between democrats and non-democrats are biggest in rural areas. Variance in education levels and household income matters most in rural areas when explaining preference for democracy.

#### **4. Conclusions**

We have identified three dimensions of preference for democracy: rejection of non-democratic alternatives; willingness to defend democracy; and preference for democracy over a strong president who does not have to bother with elections. Based on these dimensions we have identified two clusters or groups of young Namibians: Democrats and Non-democrats. Democrats are more likely to live in urban areas, be better educated and have higher incomes than Non-democrats. Both clusters are present in all thirteen regions and in all language groups. Oshiwambo-speakers in rural areas are the only exception to the overall trend. Although we do not





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believe that a cultural explanation is necessarily appropriate, we acknowledge that more research is necessary before any type of explanation can be discarded.

Overall, it appears as if Namibia does not have sufficient stock of young Democrats to make the consolidation of democracy a foregone conclusion. There is a large segment of the Namibian youth (the less educated, rural poor) for whom democracy is not yet 'the only game in town'. If one is realistic, however, democracy in Namibia is young and not everybody has had an equal chance and opportunity to gain experience with it. The processes that cultivate Democrats (education, urbanisation and a better living standard) are long-term processes and immediate results should not be expected. Without deliberate intervention on behalf of democracy, new Democrats will only be produced in the long run but it will be subject to economic progress and long-term exposure to formal education. Since rural areas are last to benefit from these long-term processes, more Democrats will be produced in urban areas. And therein lies the challenge: the majority of Namibia's young voters reside in areas that are less likely to produce Democrats.

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<sup>1</sup> The variables were tested by means of main component analysis with Varimax rotation. The Anti-image correlation matrix revealed that all variables entered had scores of >0.7 with the KMO – criterion. The Bartlett test on sphericity is highly significant and the MSA of the variables are "meritorious" (MSA = .819) and therefore suitable for a factor analysis. Furthermore, the anti-image covariance matrix (AIC) clearly meets the level proposed by Dziuban and Shirkey. (Backhaus, 1996, 205).

<sup>2</sup> Squared Euclidean distance with "Single Linkage" method.

<sup>3</sup> One should approach these labels with some degree of caution, however. There is always the danger that individuals can be labelled 'unfairly' as only a small number of attitudes are used to select and formulate the labels. We wish to stress that these labels are used for analytical purposes only. They are not intended nor should they be understood to be indicators of political 'backwardness' or 'sophistication'.

<sup>4</sup> In order to read the table correctly one has to keep in mind that each region has both clusters. For example: 61.5% of respondents in the Caprivi region forms part of the Democrats cluster and 38.5% of the respondents in the Caprivi region forms part of the Non-democrats cluster.

<sup>5</sup> Some degree of caution is called for when looking at the results. The small number of respondents in some of the regions (Karas, Hardap and Omaheke) precludes a very sophisticated analysis of the data and the findings should not be treated as much more than very useful trends that can help us understand the distribution of attitudes in a systematic manner.

<sup>6</sup> In our previous paper, (Keulder and Spilker 2001) we warned against reading too much into the analysis by language group. Due to the smallness of some of the groups, the data cannot be regarded as fully representative for all groups. Furthermore, relatively old official language statistics prevented weighting the data to rectify possible over- and under-representation of groups. Hence, we highlight trends only and do not use the data for any inferential purposes.

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