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An Overview of the *Youth and Politics Survey 2000/2001* Findings

Christiaan Keulder & Deon van Zyl

This briefing paper presents the reader with an overview of the most significant findings of the *Youth and Politics Survey 2000/2001*. The survey's objectives were five-fold. First, to assess the preference and support of 18 to 32 year old Namibians for democracy as a regime type *vis-à-vis* possible non-democratic alternatives, their willingness to defend democracy, as well as to gauge their experience of and satisfaction with democracy. Presented here are their perceptions on the performance of democratic institutions including state and government. Second, to measure their support for the political system and actors within it. Third, to gauge levels of trust and legitimacy enjoyed by the state and government. Fourth, to gauge the opinion of the youth on economic conditions in the country. Fifth, to assess their notion of citizenship.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in collaboration with Research Facilitation Services (RFS) conducted *The Youth and Politics Survey 2000/2001* during the latter half of last year (2000). This is a nationally representative survey of young Namibians between the ages of 18 and 32 years. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 1,200 respondents at their place of residence. Analysis was based upon 1,199 cases.

2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

Defining democracy

Most young Namibians defined democracy in terms of freedom and civil liberties. This suggests a liberal understanding of democracy, and as such, conforms to the gist and spirit of the Namibian Constitution. It is also possible that the country's colonial past serves to shape current understanding of democracy and that democracy is defined in terms of what colonial rule denied most Namibians: freedom and civil liberties.

Essential elements of democracy

Every democracy has elements essential to its continued existence and consolidation. These include majority rule, freedom of speech, regular elections, and multiparty competition. The majority of the respondents felt that *majority rule* was an essential element of a democratic society. Combined, close to three quarters (74.9%) felt that majority rule was important (37.5%) or absolutely essential (37.4%). A minority (28.9%) of the youth expressed the opinion that it was absolutely essential to have *complete freedom for anyone to criticise the government* in order for a society to be considered democratic. Some 40.2% of the youth felt this was important, but not absolutely essential. Almost a third (30.9%) of the respondents felt that freedom of speech was not very important (22.4%) or not important at all (8.5%). Less than half (43.3%) the youth felt that *regular elections* were absolutely essential in a democratic society. Only 30.4% of the respondents believed that *multiparty competition* is an essential element of a democracy. The majority felt that multiparty competition was not essential to a democracy.

Preference for democracy

Support for democracy was measured against support for non-democratic alternatives. A majority (62.7%) of young Namibians said that a democratic government was preferable to any other kind of government. More than a fifth (21.6%) were indifferent to the kind of government in power. Close to sixteen percent (15.7%) expressed the opinion that, in some circumstances, a non-democratic government could be preferable to a democratic one. It is worrying that more than a third of young Namibians do not value democratic government enough, or are informed enough regarding the nature of democratic government, to be willing to express open support for it. It implies that there could be potential for political mobilization on a non-democratic platform among Namibian youth.

A second question measured preference for democracy over a *strong leader that does not have to bother with elections*. Combined, more than a third (34.4%) of respondents agreed (13.5%) or strongly agreed (20.9%) that government by a strong leader would under certain circumstances be preferable to democracy. Less than fifty percent of respondents (47.8%) strongly agreed that democracy was always preferable. Anti-democratic forces have a chance of finding support among a large section of the Namibian youth even though, combined, a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (65.5%) that democracy is always preferable. This could pose a serious threat to the consolidation of democracy in Namibia. The implication is that a large part of the

young voting population would be willing to support a leader with authoritarian tendencies. This cannot bode well for the future of democracy in Namibia if the political climate should change to one where political leaders attempt to bolster their own support by harnessing anti-democratic tendencies among the youth.

The youth were also asked about their preference for certain non-democratic alternatives: one party rule, rule by traditional leaders, military rule, exclusive presidential rule, and technocratic rule. The bulk (87.9%) of the youth disapproved of the idea that only candidates from a *single party* should be allowed to stand in elections and hold office. However, less than fifty percent (44.3%) strongly disapproved of the idea.

Secondly, the majority (87.9%) of young Namibians rejected the idea that all decisions in the country should be taken by a *council of elders, traditional leaders, or chiefs*. However, less than forty percent (39.6%) strongly disapproved of the idea.

Thirdly, with regard to a *military government* the trend remained similar. The majority (89.8%) of the Namibian youth rejected the idea that military rule would be an improvement on the current political system. However, less than fifty percent (48.1%) strongly disapproved of the idea. Fourthly, the majority (84.6%) of young Namibians rejected the notion of *exclusive presidential rule* as being a better alternative to the current political system. However, only 46.7% strongly disapproved.

Finally, young Namibians lacked consensus regarding the role of *technocrats* in determining economic policy. Less than five percent (4.3%) strongly approved of the idea that economic experts rather than elected government or parliament should make key economic decisions. Slightly more than twenty percent (21.2%) approved of the idea. Only 32.9% strongly disapproved of the idea. Collectively, more than seventy percent (74.2%) of the youth expressed the opinion that elected officials or parliament should make key economic decisions.

Quality of democracy

How legitimate were the 1999 National Elections, and how democratic is the way Namibia is governed? The outcomes of the 1999 Presidential and National Assembly Elections had a high level of legitimacy among young Namibians. Slightly more than 80% (83%) of those that ventured an opinion viewed the 1999 National Elections as free and fair. Only 17% held the perception that



there was some serious level of irregularity during those elections. On the question whether Namibia was a democracy, combined, some 28.3% of respondents replied that Namibia is not a democracy (4.4%), or is a democracy with some major problems (23.9%). Some 40.4% believed that Namibia is a democracy with some minor problems. The remainder, 31.3%, were of the opinion that Namibia is a complete democracy. From the responses it became clear that only a minority of young Namibians believed that Namibia is governed in a democratic fashion. The majority, to varying degrees, believed that there is some problem (albeit small) in the way the country is governed that makes it less than democratic.

Satisfaction with democracy

Only 0.7% of those respondents who expressed an opinion felt that Namibia was not a democracy. Some 19.6% were not at all satisfied with the way democracy works while some 39.6% felt fairly satisfied, but not optimistically so. Of those who expressed more optimistic opinions, 22.7% felt satisfied while only 17.4% felt very satisfied with the way democracy is managed in Namibia. More of the youth opted for an expressly positive stance (40.1%) than an expressly negative one (20.3%). However, a large grouping (39.6%) remains that was ambivalent about the current state of affairs. Overall, one gets the impression that the youth is relatively satisfied with the way democracy works in Namibia, but that the sentiment could turn negative if circumstances forced a mood swing in the outlook of those who are fairly satisfied with (if not somewhat more critically minded towards) the current state of affairs.

3. ATTITUDES TOWARDS STATE AND GOVERNMENT

Government legitimacy

An overwhelming number of young Namibians believed that the *government deserves support because it was popularly elected*. Some 36.2% strongly agreed with the statement, while some 48.1% agreed. 9.1% was undecided. Only 6.6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This serves to indicate that young Namibians perceive government legitimacy to be linked to popular elections.

When asked if the government of Namibia was *elected to power by means of accepted procedures*, i.e. no underhand methods were used to manipulate election outcomes, the majority of the youth felt that this was the case. Some 29.6% strongly agreed that this was so, while some 52.1% agreed with the statement. Collectively, the two categories combined represent 81.7% of



those who had responded to the statement. Less than 10% (7.7%) of respondents felt that the government came to power by means of unaccepted procedures. It would appear that the government has a high level of legitimacy among the youth supported by the perception that accepted procedures were followed in selecting those eligible for public office. It is also an indication that the majority of young Namibians accept elections as the method for appointing government.

The youth lacked consensus regarding the *abuse of power by government*. A large percentage of the youth believed that the government abuses its power. More than 25% (25.1%) of those that expressed a clear opinion felt that the government abuses its power. Some 7.5% strongly agreed with the statement, while some 17.6% agreed with it. Some 22.7% were ambivalent toward government's use of power. In total, some 52.2% of respondents felt that the Namibian government does not abuse its power. Some 16.7% expressed a strong opinion in this regard, while some 35.5% were less insistent in their opinion.

Slightly more than two thirds (69.3%) of respondents agreed (47.0%) or strongly agreed (22.3%) that the *Namibian Constitution expresses the values and aspirations of the Namibian people*. Nearly a fifth (19.3%) felt that it did express the values and aspirations of the Namibian people but not completely so. Only 2.5% of respondents strongly disagreed that the Constitution was uniquely Namibian.

A large portion of the youth expressed the opinion that one should not always abide by unpopular government decisions. Close to 50% (49.1%) either disagreed (29.0%) or strongly disagreed (20.1%) that people have to *abide by unpopular government decisions*. Close to a third (33.8%) of respondents either agreed (22.7%) or strongly agreed (11.1%) that government decisions have to be respected at all times even if they are unpopular. Some 17.1% of respondents qualified their position by stating that decisions of government deserve support some of the time, but not all the time.

Trust in elected members of government

How much do the youth trust the president, local authority and regional authority councillors, and members of parliament (MPs), to do what is right? To some extent, trust in the *president* was qualified. Slightly more than a third (36.6%) of respondents said that they would always trust the



president to do what is right. However, overall, the trust in the president was high. A further 16.6% would trust the president most of the time and another 19.6% would trust him just about always.

Young Namibians did not place high levels of trust in *local authority councillors*. Only 8.9% would always trust their local authority councillors to always do the right thing. More than 10% (11.1%) felt that local authority councillors could never be trusted. A third (33.3%) felt that they could only be trusted some of the time, implying that in some instances they were untrustworthy. The youth also expressed qualified trust in *regional councillors*. Only 10.3% felt that regional councillors could always be trusted to do what is right. Some 9.9% felt that they could never be trusted. A third (33.1%) were of the opinion that one could trust them only some of the time.

The youth did not place high levels of trust in *MPs* to always do what is right. Collectively, only a third (33.4%) said that they could always (13.0%) be trusted, or trusted just about always (20.4%). 23.7% would only trust them most of the time. The remainder felt that they could only be trusted some of the time (31.6%) or never (11.3%).

Trust in non-elected members of government

What level of trust do the youth accord the military, the police, the courts-of-law, and the Electoral Commission? Young Namibians were divided in the levels of trust they accorded the *military*, but tended to be more positive than negative in outlook. Collectively, close to fifty percent (46.5%) expressed the view that the military could always (25.1%) be trusted, or just about always (21.4%) be trusted. Combined, less than a third (31.1%) of the youth felt that the military could never (9.7%) be trusted, or trusted only some of the time (21.4%). More than a fifth (22.3%) were qualified in their trust of the military stating that it could only be trusted most of the time.

Trust in the *police* was qualified but positive. Combined, some 42.9% of young Namibians would always (20.3%) trust the police to do what is right, or just about always (22.6%) do so. In contrast, close to a third (29.3%) felt that the police could never (8.1%) be trusted, or trusted only some of the time (21.1%). More than a quarter (27.8%) expressed the qualified view that the police could be trusted most of the time.

The youth exhibited positive but qualified trust in the *courts of law* to do what is right. Collectively, less than forty percent (37.4%) of the youth felt that the courts could always (15.8%) be trusted, or trusted just about always (21.6%). More than a third (36.3%) felt that the courts could only be trusted most of the time, i.e. about half the time, to do what is right. More than a quarter (26.1%)

expressed the opinion that the courts could never (4.4%) be trusted, or trusted only some of the time (21.7%).

Combined, more than forty percent (44.9%) of the youth felt that the *Electoral Commission* could always be trusted (19.1%) to do the right thing, or trusted to do so just about always (25.7%). Close to a third (32.1%) felt that it could be trusted most of the time, i.e. trusted about half the time. Less than a quarter (22.9%) expressed the view that it could never (4.7%) be trusted, or only trusted some of the time (18.2%).

Trust in the media

Young Namibians placed a high level of trust in the *Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC)*. Combined, more than more than sixty percent (64.7%) of the youth felt that the NBC could always (35.3%) be trusted, or trusted just about always (29.4%). Little more than a fifth (22.5%) of the youth said that it could be trusted most of the time. Less than thirteen percent (12.7%) felt that it could never (2.9%) be trusted, or trusted only some of the time (9.8%).

Young Namibians placed less trust in *civil society media* than state owned media. Less than forty percent (46.7%) of the youth expressed the opinion that newspapers could always (23.6%) be trusted, or trusted just about always (23.1%). Close to a third (29.8%) felt that newspapers could be trusted most of the time, i.e. trusted about half the time to do what is right. Close to a quarter (23.5%) expressed the opinion that newspapers could never (5.1%) be trusted, or trusted only some of the time (18.3%).

Government performance

How well did the president, traditional leaders, local and regional authority councillors perform their jobs in the year before the interview? The youth were highly positive about the performance of the *president* in the year before the interview. More than fifty percent (52.5%) were of the opinion that the president's performance was very good, while some 33% felt his performance was good.

The youth were positive regarding the performance of *traditional leaders* over the year preceding the interview. More than half (58.6%) were of the opinion that the performance of traditional leaders was good (41.7%) or very good (16.9%). Close to a third (30.5%) of respondents felt that performance was neither good nor bad. Little more than ten percent (10.9%) were of the opinion that they had done a bad (8.5%) or very bad (2.4%) job.

Combined, more than fifty percent (56.8%) of the youth felt that *local authority councillors* had done a good (44.2%) or very good (12.6%) job in the twelve months prior to the interview. Less than ten percent (8.4%) were of the opinion that councillors had done a bad (6.4%) or very bad job (2.0%). Overall, the youth tended to be positive about their performance.

Combined, more than sixty percent (61%) of the youth felt that *regional authority councillors* had done a good job (44%) or a very good job (17%) in the year preceding the interview. Less than thirty percent (28.3%) were of the opinion that they had done neither a good nor a bad job, i.e. that their efforts had been average. Slightly more than ten percent (10.7%) felt that they had done a bad (7.3%) or very bad (3.4%) job. Overall, the youth tended to be positive regarding the performance of regional councillors.

4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

Satisfaction with economic conditions

How well is government doing in managing the economy? Overall, the youth appeared divided on the issue of present economic performance. Only 5.3% of those that responded to the question felt very satisfied with economic conditions at the time of the interview, while close to forty percent (38.7%) felt satisfied. More than a fifth (21.0%) thought economic performance was average. More than a third (35.1%) either felt dissatisfied (24.0%) or very dissatisfied (11.0%).

The change in economic conditions over the period of a year prior to the interview did not benefit young Namibians equally. Combined, half (50.0%) felt that current economic conditions were better (41.3%) or much better (8.7%). Yet, for close to a third (30.8%) conditions were about the same. For close to a fifth (19.3%) conditions had worsened, as it now was worse (15.5%) or much worse (3.8%). When asked about their expectations regarding economic performance in the year following the interview, the majority (63.8%) of the youth felt that economic performance would improve. Combined, more than thirteen percent (13.7%) were of the opinion that it would be worse (9.0%) or much worse (4.7%). More than a fifth (22.4%) felt that it would remain roughly the same.

Capitalism or socialism

What role should the state play in providing for the individual? More than fifty percent (56.7%) of respondents agreed (20.7%), or strongly agreed (36%), that the individual should be responsible for his/her own success and wellbeing. Slightly more than a fifth (22.7%) of the respondents

expressed a strong opinion that government should be responsible for the success and wellbeing of the individual. A further fifth (20.6%) agreed that this should be the case.

Most pressing socio-economic problems

What socio-economic problems did the youth perceive as most pressing? The youth were quite clear about what they considered the most important socio-economic problems. These were: unemployment, HIV/AIDS, poverty, crime and health care. Notably absent from their list is education which is an issue of general concern.

Government performance in addressing socio-economic problems

The majority (56.7%) of the youth tended to be positive regarding the performance of government in *managing the economy*. More than forty percent (40.3%) were of the opinion that the government was doing fairly well. A further 16.4% sought it was doing very well. However, almost a third (31.6%) of the respondents said that it was not doing very well. More than ten percent (11.8%) felt that it was not doing well at all.

The majority of the youth were critical of the government's ability to create *employment*. Almost sixty percent (59.9%) felt that it was not doing very well (35.2%) or not well at all (24.6%) in delivering jobs. Combined, more than sixty percent (65.6%) of the youth felt that the government was doing a poor job of managing *price stability*. Close to forty percent (39.9%) was of the opinion that it was not doing very well. More than a quarter (25.7%) felt that it was not doing well at all. Only ten percent (10.0%) felt it was doing a very good job. The youth was divided on the issue of *crime reduction*. Little more than fifty percent (54.8%) felt that the government was doing fairly well (36.3%) or very well (18.5%) in fighting crime. However, combined, more than forty percent (45.2%) was not convinced that the government was doing a good job.

In general, the youth tended to be more positive regarding the provision of *housing* by the government. Combined, close to seventy percent (69.8%) felt that the government was either doing fairly well (45.5%) or very well (24.3%). Combined, more than two thirds (68.2%) of the youth were of the opinion that the government was doing well in addressing the *educational needs* of all Namibians. 36% felt that it was doing fairly well, while some 32.2% were of the opinion that it was doing very well. However, close to a third was dissatisfied with its efforts.

The youth was highly positive regarding the government's attempts to improve *health services*. Close to eighty percent (79.5%) thought that it was doing fairly well (40.7%) or very well (38.8%).

Combined, two thirds (66.1%) of the youth felt that it was doing fairly well (35.7%) and very well (30.4%) in delivering *basic services*. A third (33.9%) of the youth thought that it was not doing very well (20.0%) and not well at all (13.8%).

Holding government accountable

Who should be held accountable for the current socio-economic problems in Namibia? Collectively, close to seventy percent (69.6%) of respondents either agreed (30.8%) or strongly agreed (38.8%) that the incumbent government should solve the socio-economic problems of the country irrespective of who caused them. Less than a third (30.4%) blamed lack of delivery on the magnitude of problems created under South African rule.

5. CITIZENSHIP

How interested are the youth in politics and to what extent do they participate in the political process?

Interest in Politics

A minority (15.2%) of young people regularly discuss politics. The bulk (52.3%) only does so occasionally. What is worrying is that almost a third (32.5%) of the respondents never discuss any political matters. In effect they exhibited no or very little interest in what occurs in the public sphere and therefore would not be very likely to expend a lot of effort in defending democratic practices. Collectively, 64.5% of the youth paid attention to public affairs some of the time (42%) or always (22.5%). Roughly a third (35.5%) paid attention to public affairs only now and then (24.7%) or hardly ever/never (10.8%). In conclusion, only a minority of the youth pays regular attention to public affairs.

Political and Civic Participation

On average, the youth attended political events once or twice in the year preceding the interview. In some regions the youth was more politically active. Four regions were prominent. They were the Oshana, Omusati, Kavango, and Caprivi regions. Youth in those regions on average attended three to five meetings in the year preceding the interview. On average, the youth attended three to five civic events in the year prior to the interview. By civic events we mean social gatherings without a political purpose, e.g. church, music and/or dance shows, plays, and gatherings of family and friends. The region with the highest level of civic participation was Erongo, while Ohangwena had the lowest.

Electoral Participation

More than two thirds (67.3%) of respondents claimed that they were registered to vote in an election. Significantly, close to a third (32.7%) have not bothered to register for any election. Only 38.4% of all respondents could produce a valid registration card of any kind. Some 61% of all respondents claimed to have voted in the 1999 National elections before being asked to provide proof of having done so.

Voter Efficacy

The term *efficacy* can be substituted by the word *effectiveness*. We wanted to know how effective they thought their participation in elections was. The idea was to determine the extent to which the youth felt that voting makes a difference, and the extent to which they felt that elections *per se* made a difference. Collectively, close to seventy percent (69.2%) of respondents agreed (24.5%) or strongly agreed (44.6%) that the political party one votes for would make things better in the future. In general, one can say that the majority of the youth felt positive regarding their ability to bring about change, i.e. they felt that by voting one could change things for the better. Combined, close to two thirds (64.7%) of the respondents agreed (28%) or strongly agreed (36.7%) that it matters who is in power.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The themes that have been touched upon in this briefing paper will be expounded upon in further briefing papers. In this paper it was not our aim to provide an in depth analysis of the findings. A full version of the report can be downloaded from our website (www.ippr.org.na). Printed copies of the survey results will be available at the offices of the IPPR at a cost of N\$100 each.

