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## It's All About Jobs: Perceptions of Performance in Namibia

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### Introduction

With another round of national elections on the way, pre-election manoeuvring has already begun. Two new political parties have emerged. Existing parties are getting ready for another go. Political commentators are already surveying the landscape. Two new national newspapers are ready to contribute to election year debates. In light of these developments, a review of public perceptions about the state of Namibia is a good place to begin assessing whether any significant political changes are afoot. This analysis examines data collected in 2006 as part of the Afrobarometer survey.<sup>2</sup> Issues of focus include general perceptions of personal and economic status as well as evaluations of government performance in the following areas:

- creating jobs;
- reducing income disparities;
- combating crime;
- improving health services;
- improving educational services; and
- fighting corruption.

When looked at from three perspectives – nationally, by age and by region – three patterns were evident. Firstly, both contentment and optimism were prominent in the responses of those interviewed. Secondly, the majority of those interviewed were of the opinion that the government made progress in providing education and healthcare services. Thirdly, people were less impressed with government's efforts to create jobs or reduce the income gap between rich and poor.

In 2006 there were good reasons for many Namibians to feel complacent. The country had experienced sixteen years of political stability. In 2005, there had been a peaceful transition of power from President Sam Nujoma to President Hfikepunye Pohamba. The only notable disruptions to the

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<sup>2</sup> Afrobarometer surveys measure attitudes towards democracy, the economy and civil society in eighteen African countries. Round Three of this survey was carried out in Namibia in early 2006. Across all thirteen regions, 1,200 people were interviewed. The IPPR is the national partner for the fourth round scheduled for later in 2008.

political calm were the secessionist incidents of 1999 in the Caprivi Region and the overflow from Angola of the conflict between Unita and the Angolan government which ended in 2002 with the death of Jonas Savimbi. Even though both events were serious, with military actions taking place as well as the loss of life, they were short-lived and locally concentrated. They were a far cry from the widespread conflict of the liberation struggle between Swapo and South Africa which lasted close to three decades.

Not only was the country stable, there was also steady, though muted, economic growth. For the period from 1995 to 2005, Namibia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose by an average annual rate of 4.1 percent. Per capita GDP rose by a more modest average annual rate of 1.5 percent.<sup>3</sup> According to the 2003/04 National Household Income and Expenditure Survey (NHIES), the decade between 1994 and 2004 saw both poverty and severe poverty decline and disparities in income distribution narrow. Namibia became the only sub-Saharan country on target to meet Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015. The NHIES showed moderate progress on reducing income disparities. As measured by the Gini coefficient, Namibia had, when measured in 1993/94, the highest level of income disparities in the world. Its Gini coefficient was 0.69. By 2003 it had declined to 0.60, and Namibia lost its dubious honour.

This period of post-liberation stability, modest economic growth as well as reductions in poverty led to a reasonable expectation by Namibians that the present year was better than last year, and that the coming year would be better than this year. Indeed, Afrobarometer data clearly indicates the existence and strength of these expectations. However, when more specific issues are examined, cracks appear in this facade of contentment.

### General Perceptions of Government Performance

Respondents were asked to define: their current living conditions and perceptions of economic performance. They were also asked to provide both their outlook on these questions 12 months earlier (2005), and in 12 months' time (2007). The options for responses were: very bad, bad, neutral, good and very good. For the purpose of this analysis, categories are combined into negative (very bad, bad), neutral and positive (good, very good).<sup>4</sup> Table 1 below shows the results of this comparison.

*Table 1: Perceptions of Past, Present and Future Living Conditions, Total Sample, in Percent*

	Present Conditions Compared to Previous year (2005)	Current Conditions Year (2006)	Expected Conditions in the Coming Year (2007)
Negative	14	29	7
Neutral	37	27	26
Positive	49	41	60

Almost one third, (29 percent) of those who participated in the survey had a negative evaluation of their current living conditions. Yet, roughly half of respondents also state that their present conditions

<sup>3</sup> At fixed 1995 prices. Based on National Accounts, source, IPPR Database, <http://www.ippr.org.na>

<sup>4</sup> Please note that due to space limitations, non responses and "don't know" responses do not appear in the results. Hence, some tabulations may not add to 100.

were positive when compared to the previous year. Only 14 percent of those surveyed felt that their present conditions were worse than the previous year. When looking forward to expectations for the coming year, a mere 7 percent were pessimistic while 60 percent were hopeful. The number of neutral responses needs to be considered. Just over one quarter of respondents were neutral about their current and future situations, and 37 percent were neutral about their current situation when compared to the previous year. This large number of fence-sitters could have a major impact on the outcome of the next election depending on how they perceive their situation in the run up to 2009.

When asked about the general state of the economy the optimistic pattern is not just repeated, it was enhanced. A majority of respondents felt good about the economy in 2006, and a whopping 70 percent thought it would be even better in 2007. This can be seen in Table 2.

*Table 2: Perceptions of Past, Present and Future Economic Conditions, Total Sample, in Percent*

	<b>Current Economic Conditions Compared to Previous year (2005)</b>	<b>Current Economic Conditions Year (2006)</b>	<b>Expected Economic Conditions in the Coming Year (2007)</b>
Negative	14	18	9
Neutral	28	21	16
Positive	56	59	72

On specific issues, however, a different pattern emerges. Respondents were asked to rate government's performance on a series of questions, six of which are examined below. Here, there was no option of a neutral answer. They had to choose from different degrees of either good, or bad. The government did not fare well when it comes to creating jobs or reducing income disparities. To be sure, economic growth since 1990 has been steady, but moderate. Yet, unemployment has remained stubbornly high, and for many in the communal agricultural sector access to formal marketing structures is still a dream. On combating crime and corruption, the results were pretty much even. This study was completed just as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) began operations. The 2008 follow-up survey will, therefore, be a good indicator of its impact.

Expanding education and healthcare have been a major priority of the government since Independence. Subsequently, both sectors have regularly received the largest share of annual government budget allocations. Generally, Namibia has received praise for delivering increased access to education and healthcare. Yet, in recent years debates on education and healthcare have shifted increasingly to the quality of those services. This signals a shift in expectations which was not evident in 2006 but which bears watching. Building clinics and schools may not be sufficient for public approval. The quality of those schools and clinics in terms of staffing by qualified personnel, sufficient supplies and materials, as well as a high standard of service delivery could become the measure by which the public judges success in these sectors.

*Table 3: Perceptions of Specific Service Delivery, Total Sample, in Percent*

	<b>Creating Jobs</b>	<b>Eliminating Income Disparities</b>	<b>Combating Crime</b>	<b>Improving Health Services</b>	<b>Improving Education Services</b>	<b>Combating Corruption</b>
Negative	56	57	50	26	27	48

Positive	43	41	50	73	71	50
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## Age

Age as a factor in elections will gain in importance. Increasingly, active participants in the liberation struggle have hints of grey in their beards and hair, and many are fighting the dreaded middle-aged spread.<sup>5</sup> The 2009 election will, for the first time, include young Namibians as voters who have only known an independent Namibia. This 'Born Free' generation, as they are called, understands South West Africa, the SADF and apartheid largely from the history books. The motivations of these young people could be very different from their elders. They may be more likely to blame the problems of their present situation not on a colonial past, but on the current political leadership. Good jobs, political stability, upward mobility, and other as yet unseen issues will affect voting patterns among them. As each year goes by, they will only grow in numbers. It is probably safe to assume that most Namibians who were under the age of ten or so back in 1990 will think, and vote, much like the 'Born Free' generation. Their entry into the public arena brings a new dynamic which political parties ignore at their peril.

A breakdown of the results on current living conditions by age gives interesting results. A higher percentage of Namibians over 50 have negative perceptions of their current living conditions than the rest of the sample. This class of respondents is more likely to live on fixed incomes, particularly those over 60 who collect the monthly social pension from the government. As was pointed out in a recent IPPR analysis of the 2008/2009 budget<sup>6</sup>, the proposed increase from N\$370 to N\$450 per month in the social pension will only return pensioners to the purchasing power they had in 1990. Social pensions are not linked to inflation, and thus they generally see an annual decline in their purchasing power. This group also gives the lowest scores for positive responses to their current living conditions.

Respondents in their 40s had the highest level of positive feelings about their situation. Eighteen years ago this group was in their mid 20s to mid 30s. They are likely to have benefited most from post-Independence stability and growth, while at the same time being able to compare their current situation with what it might have been under apartheid. Once more, prospects for the future bring high levels of optimism. The age group from 25 to 29, sees a drop of 11 percentage points in the neutral category, which when combined with a 20 point decrease in the negative category, results in 60 percent of them feeling good about their future prospects. Whether or not this optimism is fulfilled could become a major issue in 2009. Tables 4 and 5 below show perceptions of current and future living conditions by age group.

*Table 4.: Perception of Current (2006) Living Conditions by Age Group, in Percent*

	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Negative	29	28	27	24	38	37
Neutral	26	34	28	26	23	24
Positive	45	38	44	50	38	31

<sup>5</sup> The author, to his personal regret, is among them.

<sup>6</sup> *National Budget 2008/09: Great Dollops of Jam*. IPPR Briefing Paper No. 42, March 2008. Institute of Public Policy Research, Windhoek.

*Table 5.: Perception of Future (2007) Living Conditions by Age Group, in Percent*

	<b>18-24</b>	<b>25-29</b>	<b>30-39</b>	<b>40-49</b>	<b>50-59</b>	<b>60+</b>
Negative	7	9	8	6	6	7
Neutral	28	27	27	21	26	28
Positive	61	60	59	65	55	51

Specific questions without the option of a neutral response are again telling. Respondents are much more critical across the board. Most age groups give the government poor marks when looking at job creation. Responses indicating that the government has not done a good job range between 54 percent and 60 percent for most age groups. Those above the age of 60 are evenly split. When it comes to reducing income gaps, the poor marks increase for each age cohort. Thus, some of those who give the government good marks for creating jobs, may not be of the opinion that the pay from those jobs is sufficient to eliminate income disparities. The 18 to 24 age group showed little difference from other age groups.

*Table 6.: Government Performance in Creating Jobs by Age, in Percent*

	<b>18-24</b>	<b>25-29</b>	<b>30-39</b>	<b>40-49</b>	<b>50-59</b>	<b>60+</b>
<b>Negative</b>	55	54	57	60	55	49
<b>Positive</b>	45	42	42	39	44	48

*Table 7.: Government Performance in Narrowing Income Gaps Between Rich and Poor by Age, in Percent*

	<b>18-24</b>	<b>25-29</b>	<b>30-39</b>	<b>40-49</b>	<b>50-59</b>	<b>60+</b>
<b>Negative</b>	57	59	54	60	66	55
<b>Positive</b>	43	39	45	38	33	42

All age groups are positive about improvements to healthcare and education. It should be kept in mind that the majority of these respondents remember the apartheid-era situation, when such services were withheld from the majority of Namibians. For younger respondents increased access to these services may be viewed as normal. For them, and those who follow, access to education may take second place to the extent to which education is related to their ability to find employment. Similarly, the quality of healthcare, particularly since the rise of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, may also become the defining characteristic by which government is judged. On combating crime, results are evenly split. Attitudes on combating corruption, however, show an interesting trend. Younger respondents were more critical that older respondents of the government's attempts to eliminate corruption.

*Table 8.: Perceptions of Performance on Some Basic Services by Age, in Percent*

	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Reducing Crime</b>						
Negative	51	49	49	50	54	49
Positive	48	51	50	50	46	51
<b>Improving Health Services</b>						
Negative	29	23	26	23	27	26
Positive	70	77	73	75	67	71
<b>Improving Education Services</b>						
Negative	32	29	27	22	23	39
Positive	67	70	72	76	73	57
<b>Combating Corruption</b>						
Negative	50	51	48	43	46	40
Positive	46	46	49	52	52	58

### ***Whither the regions?***

Ever since the Rally for Democracy and Progress Party (RDP) was registered as a political party, there has been a perception that the Ohangwena and Oshikoto regions will form a power base for the RDP – a base with the potential to reduce the Swapo majority in Parliament. Data from the 2006 survey, however, does not show significant differences between these two regions and the patterns found thus far.

Faith in the future, when examined by region, just as with different age groups, is strong. Respondents from Erongo, Hardap, Karas, Kavango and Kunene were more pessimistic about their current situation. Yet, for all five regions when future prospects are included, this pessimism dissipated. Three regions, Ohangwena and Oshikoto, and Omusati, are worth special attention in light of recent political developments. The first two are supposedly where higher levels of support for the RDP are expected, while the latter is considered the heartland of support for the supposed faction of Swapo that supports President Nujoma. In terms of respondent's evaluation of present conditions, all three are similar in the responses elicited from the survey. Negative perceptions of current living conditions are around 25 percent. Neutral perceptions in these three regions hover close to 30 percent. Interestingly, Omusati respondents give the lowest percent of positive answers to their current status. Omusati residents were also slightly less optimistic about improvements to either their living conditions, or the economy.

*Table 9. : Current and Future Prospects by Region, in Percent*

	Present Living Conditions			Future Living Conditions*			Future Economic Conditions		
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Caprivi	25	21	53	4	21	61	4	18	75
Erongo	42	19	39	21	32	44	19	26	53
Hardap	38	31	31	4	23	73	2	9	89
Karas	38	34	28	7	36	55	5	18	77
Kavango	38	26	36	3	24	66	10	29	61
Khomas	23	33	44	7	27	66	8	19	73
Kunene	43	22	35	18	28	51	11	15	74
Ohangwena	25	30	45	4	19	67	1	16	82
Omaheke	33	20	47	5	50	38	36	8	50
Omusati	24	32	43	8	23	56	14	9	72
Oshana	19	23	56	5	19	66	7	9	82
Oshikoto	24	28	48	3	26	59	10	20	64
Otjozondjupa	32	20	46	10	36	48	24	26	47

Caprivi had 14 percent “don’t know” responses

Once more, it is the detailed questions that bring a more varied response. In terms of job creation only three regions, Kavango Ohangwena and Oshikoto, gave the government good marks. Responses on reducing income gaps were as before, although Hardap and Ohangwena were the only regions where the split between negative and positive was roughly equal.

*Table 10. : Perceptions of Government Performance on Job Creation and Reducing Income Gaps by Region, in Percent*

	Job Creation		Reducing Income Gaps	
	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
Caprivi	53	41	59	39
Erongo	72	28	66	32
Hardap	68	32	48	52
Karas	64	36	55	44
Kavango	33	66	52	46
Khomas	67	35	55	45

Kunene	60	38	60	35
Ohangwena	28	70	48	50
Omaheke	73	23	71	18
Omusati	60	38	53	45
Oshana	56	44	52	47
Oshikoto	44	55	71	26
Otjonzondjupa	61	36	65	36

Perceptions of crime prevention were mixed. In some regions there were high positives in others high negatives. Respondents from Caprivi, Kavango, and Ohangwena (again) give the government high marks. These same three regions also give government high marks on combating corruption. Providing education and health services are areas where government gets high marks in the majority of regions. Erongo, Kunene and Otjonzondjupa, however, all give the government poor marks in these two areas. The reasons for this are unclear at this time. Results for these questions are in Tables 11 and 12.

*Table 11. : Perceptions of Government Performance on Combating Crime and Providing Educational Services by Region, in Percent*

	Combating Crime		Education	
	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
Caprivi	19	77	16	84
Erongo	61	37	58	39
Hardap	68	32	30	67
Karas	70	31	26	74
Kavango	20	80	15	84
Khomas	64	37	24	76
Kunene	55	43	60	36
Ohangwena	29	71	10	90
Omaheke	48	50	36	60
Omusati	51	48	29	68
Oshana	51	48	14	84
Oshikoto	56	43	20	74
Otjonzondjupa	54	46	51	48

*Table 12. : Perceptions of Government Performance on Providing Health Services and Combating Corruption by Region, in Percent*

	Healthcare		Combating Corruption	
	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
Caprivi	13	86	22	70
Erongo	47	51	67	31
Hardap	29	72	67	33
Karas	14	86	66	34
Kavango	9	91	20	76
Khomas	19	82	53	48
Kunene	51	46	53	41
Ohangwena	7	93	16	80
Omaheke	31	61	60	36
Omusati	32	68	58	49
Oshana	25	74	49	51
Oshikoto	31	66	60	38
Otjozondjupa	58	42	75	33

## Conclusion

Data from 2006 indicates very high levels of personal satisfaction and optimism for the future. There is disappointment on specific issues with job creation and income distribution being the most notable. However, there is a saying that in politics a week can be a very long time. Now, two years on, as President Pohamba enters the final years of his first term, we have to wonder if the goodwill and optimism of the first decade and a half of independence are enough to outweigh a mixed report on government performance in key areas such as job creation and reducing income disparities. These concerns are evidenced throughout the electorate, regardless of age or region. A key element in the answer will be today's youth. With every year they become a larger proportion of the voting population, and they are more likely to hold the current government accountable for any problems or concerns they have with their lives.

## References

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