

Abstract

Namibia enjoys a relatively well-earned reputation as a tranquil nation, wherein elections are usually regarded as peaceful affairs. However, the results of the Afrobarometer survey indicate that between a quarter and a third of the population fears becoming a victim of violence during election time. Indeed, although rare, violence is not uncommon in Namibia. This may be particularly so in times where Swapo's (South West Africa People's Organization) dominance appears to be challenged, with rising tension and more frequent clashes; notably in the party's heartland in the central north, where there has hardly ever been any real political competition.

In addition to a desk review of past elections and interviews with key informants, the research carried out within the context of the PEV-SADC project attempted to gauge Namibians' current thoughts and experience relating to electoral violence. To this end a survey was conducted on 136 respondents, adopting the analytical framework employed by G. Bardall in her study on gender and electoral violence. According to this typology, electoral violence is classified as being physical, economic, or social-psychological. In addition, the differences between women and men's experience of violence are also duly highlighted.

The results of the survey show that a minority of Namibians are concerned, or affected by electoral violence. Namibians expressed their fear of being victimized, and confirmed that certain areas were dangerous 'no-go zones' during electoral periods. Similarly, they reported that businesses could face boycotts based on political affiliation and reported feeling pressure from their families and partners when it came to making a choice about who to vote for. The findings of the survey should not be extrapolated to the Namibian population as a whole, as it was conducted using a convenience sample and not a representative one. Nevertheless, as reflected by other sources, the survey shows that while not a major source of concern for Namibians, electoral violence is not something they underestimate.