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The 2003 Windhoek West Voter's Registration Roll

Christiaan Keulder and Tania Wiese

In 2003 the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) re-registered all eligible voters. This paper is the first step to evaluate this process. It uses the recently published Voters' Registration Roll (VRR) for Windhoek West, a small urban constituency which recently held a by-election. It presents data on the age and gender breakdown of registered voters, and shows that age and gender gaps are not significant. It also highlights the fact that the new list contains some double entries, and argues that even though these entries made no difference to the outcomes of the elections, a compromised list could undermine the legitimacy of future elections.

1. Introduction

The Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) is required by law to re-register all eligible voters every 10 years. It began doing so in July of 2003. The re-registration process enabled the ECN to start from scratch. A new registration form with additional data-entry fields, as well as photographs, was designed to obtain more information about registered voters. New technology was employed to enable the ECN to obtain digital photographs of registered voters and to scan the information from the registration forms. These, together with some other measures, were employed not only to speed up the registration process, but also to improve the integrity of the VRR.

Recently the IPPR published an analysis of the 1999 VRR¹. Even though that VRR is no longer in use, the analysis highlighted a substantial number of inaccuracies caused by technical shortcomings in the registration process. These shortcomings included: inaccurate data entry; inconsistency with regard to spelling of names, surnames and addresses during the actual registration process, as well as the data entry phase; insufficient cleaning and updating of the list; and insufficient data on the registered voters themselves. It was also clear that the 1999 VRR failed to keep track of the movement of registered voters and that a number of deceased voters were never removed from the list.

Much of the integrity of an election depends on the integrity of the VRR. By law the ECN is required to make the VRR public and to allow political parties sufficient time to inspect the VRR and lodge legal complaints. The cumbersome task of going through the long printed lists, as well as the lack of human and technological capacity within the political parties, raised some concerns about the effectiveness of this process.

¹ See Keulder, Van Zyl and Wiese (2003).

The re-registration process ended shortly before the Regional Council by-election in the Windhoek West Constituency, in the Khomas Region. This by-election provided an opportunity to reflect not only on the outcomes of the elections (however significant or insignificant these may be), but also on the performance of the new re-registration process. Given the fact that only some 17,300 cases had to be analysed, this review process was relatively painless compared to that of a national VRR. Yet, this paper shows that much can be learned from such a small exercise.

The analysis focuses on two aspects of the recent by-election. Firstly, it takes a closer look at the registration process, and presents an overall assessment of the process, by looking at the integrity of the VRR for Windhoek West, as well as the demographic profile of registered voters in that constituency. It presents age and gender profiles, as well as the means of registration. The second part of the paper looks at the political consequences of these by-elections and tracks the results of each Regional Council election for this constituency, since the first elections in 1992.

2. The Demographic Profile of Registered Voters

According to the VRR for Windhoek West, the ECN registered 17,300 eligible voters during the national re-registration process. The total population for the Windhoek West Constituency is 42,201². The Voting Age Population (VAP) for this constituency – i.e. persons above the age of 18 residing in the Windhoek West Constituency – is 29,701³. This means that the 70.4% of the residents in this area are eligible for voting. The number of registered voters amounts to approximately 57.4% of the total number of eligible voters. The total number of registered voters increased by 1,214 voters from 1999, when 16,086 voters were registered. This is an increase of 7.5%.

Age

In recent times, the Namibian youth has been singled out for its perceived low levels of participation: this perception was contradicted by the findings of this study. Table 1 presents an overview of the breakdown of age cohorts in both the VRR and the VAP⁴ from the 2001 Population and Housing Census. The results are fairly similar suggesting that the VRR shows the same age profile as the Census: thus the VRR is an accurate reflection of the general age profile of Namibia's VAP.

The highest proportion of registered voters falls in the 18 to 25 year age category (28.4%). Approximately 87% of the registered voters are aged between 18 and 50 years. In 1999 7.2% of registered voters in Windhoek West were younger than 25 years; 77% were younger than 50 years. This means that the proportion of younger voters increased relative to older voters from 1999 to 2003.

The biggest difference between the 2003 VRR and the VAP is in the 18 to 25 year age cohort, where over-representation is approximately 3% (28.4% vs. 25.5%). The second biggest difference is in the 26 to 30 year age cohort: about 15% of the voters registered fall in this age category,

² This information was received from the Central Statistics Office of the National Planning Commission, and is drawn from the 2001 National Census. Census and voting constituencies overlap.

³ This number excludes a proportion of the population for which the Census provides no age information. If this group is added to the VAP the total number is 30,156.

⁴ The VAP includes all eligible voters in Namibia, i.e. those citizens that are 18 years or older.

compared to around 16% of the VAP. Table 1 thus shows that as far as registration for elections is concerned the youth is not under-represented.

Table 1: Age cohorts from the VRR and VAP

Age cohort	VRR %	VAP %
18 to 25 years	28.4	25.5
26 to 30 years	15.1	16.1
31 to 35 years	13.8	13.9
36 to 40 years	11.5	11.7
41 to 45 years	10.7	10.2
46 to 50 years	7.3	6.7
51 to 55 years	4.7	4.7
56 to 60 years	3.0	3.0
61 to 65 years	2.0	2.3
66 to 70 years	1.2	1.5
71 to 75 years	0.9	1.0
76 to 80 years	0.6	0.8
81 to 85 years	0.3	0.6
86 to 90 years	0.2	0.4
91 to 95 years	< 0.1	0.2
Older than 95 years	0.1	< 0.1
Total	100	100

Another way of thinking about the significance of age is to divide the population into two broad age cohorts: those that came of voting age after Independence, and those that did so before Independence. Theories of political leaning suggest that citizens' political orientations are shaped by political experiences accumulated over a lifetime. As such, Namibia's Independence from South African rule represents an important event which would have caused a major shift in political experiences of ordinary citizens. By dividing the population into these two experience-based categories, we are able to assess some aspects of their political leaning. Do those Namibians that came of voting age during the colonial period participate more in politics than those who did not experience the same degree of oppression? Do those that came of age during the liberation struggle value democracy more, and hence participate more (as they are more aware of the costs of not having it)? Are those that came of political age after Independence more likely to participate because they have less experience with colonial oppression and equal experience with democracy? Although the limited data contained in the VRR does not allow us to answer these questions in full, it is nevertheless possible to detect overall generational trends.

Table 2 shows that 56.5% of the registered voters in Windhoek West were already 18 years old before or in the year of Independence: while 43.5% only turned 18 after Independence. The VAP profile for Windhoek West shows a similar profile: 57.8% came of voting age before Independence, and 42.2% did so after Independence.



Table 2: People of voting age before and after Independence

	N	VRR %	N	VAP %
18 after Independence	7,529	43.5	12,532	42.2
18 before Independence	9,771	56.5	17,169	57.8
Total	17,300	100.0	29,701	100

This too suggests that, as far as registering for elections is concerned, the youth in the Windhoek West Constituency is not under-represented: in fact, they are slightly over-represented (1.3%).

Gender⁵

Another (often untested) proposition about political participation is that women, due to customs and practices of gender inequality, are less likely to participate in politics than men. However, Table 3 shows that this is not the case with regard to registering for elections, as more women than men appear on the VRR. Of the voters registered in Windhoek West, 46% are male and 54% are female. Of the eligible voters in Windhoek West, 51.6% are female and 48.4% are male. This indicates that in the VRR women are slightly over-represented and men slightly under-represented in almost all age cohorts.

Table 3: Age by gender

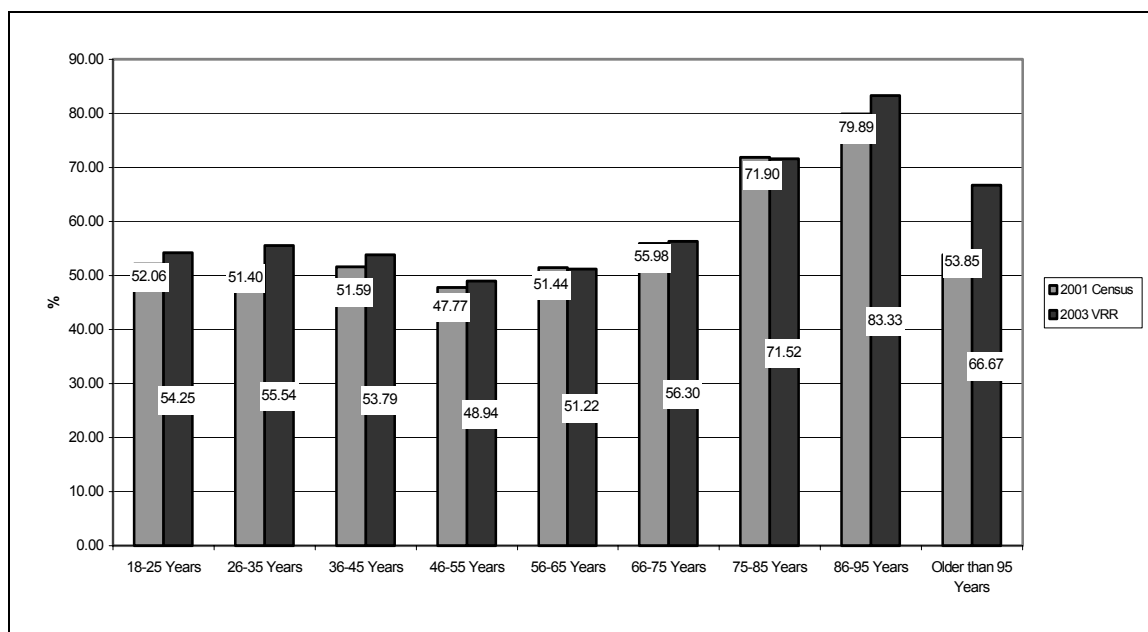
Age	VRR		VAP	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
18 to 25 years	45.8	54.2	47.9	52.1
26 to 35 years	44.5	55.5	48.6	51.4
36 to 45 years	46.2	53.8	48.4	51.6
46 to 55 years	51.1	48.9	52.2	47.8
56 to 65 years	48.8	51.2	48.6	51.4
66 to 75 years	43.7	56.3	44.0	56.0
76 to 85 years	28.5	71.5	28.1	71.9
86 to 95 years	16.7	83.3	20.1	79.9
Older than 95 years	33.3	66.7	46.2	53.8

The biggest gender difference is found in the 86 to 95 year category, where around 20% of the Windhoek West residents are male and 80% female (the biggest gender difference in registration figures is also found in this category – see Table 2 above). This is followed by the 76 to 85 year age category, where around 28% of residents are male and 72% are female. Graph 1 provides a comparison of the VRR and the VAP for women.

⁵ Due to the fact that up to 1999 no gender statistics were collected during the registration process, we cannot provide any comparison with the current data.



Graph 1: Percentage of women by age cohort – 2001 Census and 2003 VRR



The VRR shows that in Windhoek West more women than men are registered, which thus presents further evidence that certain perceptions of gender gaps in participation should be revisited. This, however, does not mean that there are no gender gaps with regard to actual voting.

3. Method of Registration

One of the key issues about registration is having access to the required official documentation. Eligible voters are required by law to prove their eligibility to vote by presenting an official means of identification (such as an ID, passport or birth certificate), and in addition, in the case of regional elections, proof of residence. Since a substantial proportion of the Namibian population do not have the required formal documentation, the ECN provides for registration by means of sworn statements. Even though sworn statements are regarded as a potentially problematic solution to the problem, our analysis of the 1999 VRR showed that one third (33.1%) of all Namibian voters in 1999 would not have been able to register without this provision.⁶ In general, we found the use of sworn statements to be highest among young and rural voters.⁷

Some 3,279 or 19% of voters in the Windhoek West Constituency registered for the 2003 by-elections by means of sworn statements.⁸ Of these 1,430 or 43.6% were men, and 1,849 or 56.4% were women. There is thus a substantial gender gap in the use of sworn statements. In contrast, to these figures, only 1,423 voters were registered with sworn statements in 1999. The use of sworn statements in the Windhoek West Constituency has thus increased by a staggering 130% from 1999 to 2003.

⁶ See Keulder, Van Zyl and Wiese (2003).

⁷ Technically the solution to the sworn statement problem falls within the service realm of the Ministry of Home Affairs and not with the ECN.

⁸ The remaining 81% used either IDs or passports.



Some 89% of those who used sworn statements in 2003 were between 18 and 35 years, and some 96% were 45 years and younger. This confirms one of our earlier findings: it is largely the younger voters who struggle to obtain the necessary official documentation. This also seems to suggest access to official documentation has decreased since Independence: of those that used sworn statements 82% came of voting age after Independence. There is only a very slight gender gap within the age cohorts: some 95% of men who used sworn statements are between 18 and 45 years, whereas 96.2% of women who used sworn statements are of the same age. Of those who used sworn statements in 1999, 66% were younger than 35 years and 89% younger than 45. Thus the use of sworn statements within these groups increased significantly from 1999 to 2003. These findings suggest that access to official means of identification has deteriorated since 1999.⁹

4. Problems with the 2003 VRR

It is very difficult, if not near impossible, to protect the integrity of voters' registers against the effects of population migration and immigration, unrecorded deaths, inaccurate data entries, and a host of other problems. The purpose of regular re-registration is to allow election administrators to start afresh – to get rid of seriously compromised lists and compile new ones. Elsewhere we highlighted the problems which compromised the integrity of the 1999 VRR and made some suggestions as to how these problems could be rectified or at least minimised.¹⁰

The IPPR subjected the 2003 VRR for Windhoek West to a basic test for double entries. Using IntegIT! software, the test looked for registered voters with a) the same or similar surnames, and b) the same birth dates. The test returned 42 instances where two or more registered voters matched on both surname and birth date. A closer inspection of these matches revealed the following:

- Clear double entries: There are at least eight cases where the same individual managed to register twice. That means that surnames, names, birth dates and addresses are exactly the same or very, very similar, but registration numbers differ. In one case, an individual managed to secure sequential registration numbers.
- Possible husband/wife or brother/sister: A small number of entries match on surnames, addresses and birth dates, but differ on gender. It is possible that these could be married couples or different gendered twins, but it is perhaps more likely that birthdays were erroneously recorded.
- Potential double entries: Some 13 entries matched on all categories except first names. These people were born on the same date, have the same surnames and addresses, are of the same gender, but have different first names. These cases should be verified for authenticity.
- Other: Nineteen cases match on surnames and birth dates, but differ on address. These cases may also be of the same gender, but not always.

This simple test of matching surnames and birth dates shows that 0.24% of the cases in the 2003 Windhoek West Constituency warrant close inspection. These cases are clearly not enough to

⁹ At this point in time it is not clear whether or not this trend is confined to this constituency only. We suspect that it is not.

¹⁰ See Keulder, Van Zyl and Wiese (2003).



have made a difference to the outcome of the elections¹¹, but do point to problems with the registration process. So, what causes these mistakes and why are they not picked up?

Firstly, one has to understand the special circumstances under which the VRR for Windhoek West was produced. It took place during the national re-registration process, but had to be made public very soon after the closure of the overall registration process. Thus the time for 'cleaning' it may have been limited.

Secondly, a closer look at the variables suggests that inconsistent data recording might be one root cause. Registration officials complete the registration forms by first writing the information down on the registration form, and then scratching the appropriate fields to enable scanning, but without any prescriptions or protocols for spelling. For example, this means that 'Windhoek' could be spelled 'WHK' or 'Windhoek', and 'Windhoek West' could be entered as 'WHK-WEST', 'Windhoek West', 'WHK West' or even 'Windhoekwest'.

Addresses suffer the same fate. Names are misspelled (e.g. Kennedy could be recorded as 'Kennety'), and second and third names are sometimes entered as initials, sometimes written out in full. All these factors mean that information identifying the same individual could appear in the database as two different individuals when an ordinary search-and-match is performed. The fact that the manually recorded data is computerised by means of scanning means that these problems are simply carried over to the database.

Thirdly, it might be useful to introduce spelling and recording protocols, and train the registration officials in the use of such protocols.

It is our belief that the mistakes contained in the 2003 Windhoek West list did not alter the outcomes of the election. Thus they did not make the election less free or fair. We would, however, argue that the one should not be unconcerned about the mistakes in the VRR. A clean VRR, without double entries, has intrinsic value. A compromised list triggers suspicion about the integrity of elections in general, and as such it undermines democratic legitimacy. It puts in doubt not only the legitimacy of those who are victorious in the election, but also that of the very agency which manages elections.

5. Conclusion

The ECN is obliged by law to re-register all Namibian voters every 10 years, which they have just done. This paper makes use of the opportunity presented by the recent by-election in the Windhoek West Constituency for which the VRR had to be made public. As such, this paper is the first attempt to analyse some data contained in the new VRR. The addition of gender information on the new registration forms now allows, for the first time, the analysis of gender patterns with regard to elections.

Data presented here contradicts the commonly held notion that young Namibians are dropping out of the political system. If the Windhoek West Constituency is representative, rather the opposite is true: it is the older generations who are under-represented. We have also established that it is the

¹¹ The fact that someone is registered more than once does not mean that the individual voted more than once. Alternative measures, such as the use of ink-spots on thumbnails on registration would go a long way to prevent that.



younger generation, especially those who have come of voting age since Independence that experience the greatest problems in accessing official documentation: it is this generation that makes most frequent use of sworn statements to register.

Contrary to popular belief, we detected no serious gender gap in voters in Windhoek West. This, of course, does not mean that there is no such gap in the rest of the country, or in selected constituencies elsewhere. We also would not argue that gender gaps do not exist beyond the registration process – there is simply not enough information at this point in time to explore this further.¹²

Comparing population statistics with the VRR and with turnout statistics, we conclude that although the registration campaign was satisfactory, a substantial number of registered voters failed to cast a vote. The fact that by-elections generally tend to be low-key affairs might explain why this is the case, but more research is needed.

Finally, after subjecting the Windhoek West VRR to a simple test matching surnames and birth dates, we discovered a number of double entries or dubious cases. The new VRR requires significant further cleaning before it is released for the next round of elections, and presented as a list with its integrity intact. We found that the root causes of such inaccuracies were much the same as those we discovered in the 1999 VRR. These stem mainly from the data-recording process at the registration points, and not from the data-entry process.

6. Bibliography

Keulder, C., Van Zyl, D. and Wiese, T. (2003). Report on the 1999 Voters' Registration Roll: Analysis and Recommendations. *IPPR Research Report 4*. IPPR: Windhoek.

¹² Although it would be possible to extract the required information from control lists used by the ECN at the polls, these lists are sealed together with the ballot papers and are not open to public inspection.