



Gender in Namibia: Growing support for women's leadership, concerns about violence

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 22 | Nangula Shejavali

Summary

Namibians express increasing levels of support for women in political leadership, but Namibian women continue to trail men slightly in their interest in public affairs and participation in civic action, according to the latest Afrobarometer survey.

Compared to men, Namibian women show higher levels of support for women in political leadership, are more likely to believe that women should have an equal chance of becoming political leaders, and turned out in larger numbers to register to vote in the 2014 elections. But they remain somewhat less likely than men to participate in certain kinds of community activities that demand action from government and to contact government officials and traditional leaders about an important issue.

Despite significant gains in increasing the number of women in the National Assembly, women continue to express somewhat less interest in politics than men. On the positive side, interest in political affairs has been on a steady rise amongst both men and women since 2008.

A topline gender issue is that of gender-based violence (GBV). One in 10 survey respondents say that they or family members were victims of GBV in the past year. Most Namibians view alcohol as a major contributing factor to GBV, whereas cultural and traditional norms are not perceived as top contributing factors to this type of violence.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 is currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Namibia, led by Survey Warehouse and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), interviewed 1,200 adult Namibians in October 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Namibia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Key findings

- Eight of 10 Namibians (80%) believe women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men, an increase from 70% in 2012.
- Although women express higher levels of support for women in political leadership than their male counterparts (86% compared to 73%), they continue to show lower (albeit increasing) levels of interest in politics (63% of women "somewhat" or "very" interested vs. 70% of men). They also are less likely to discuss politics (66% of women

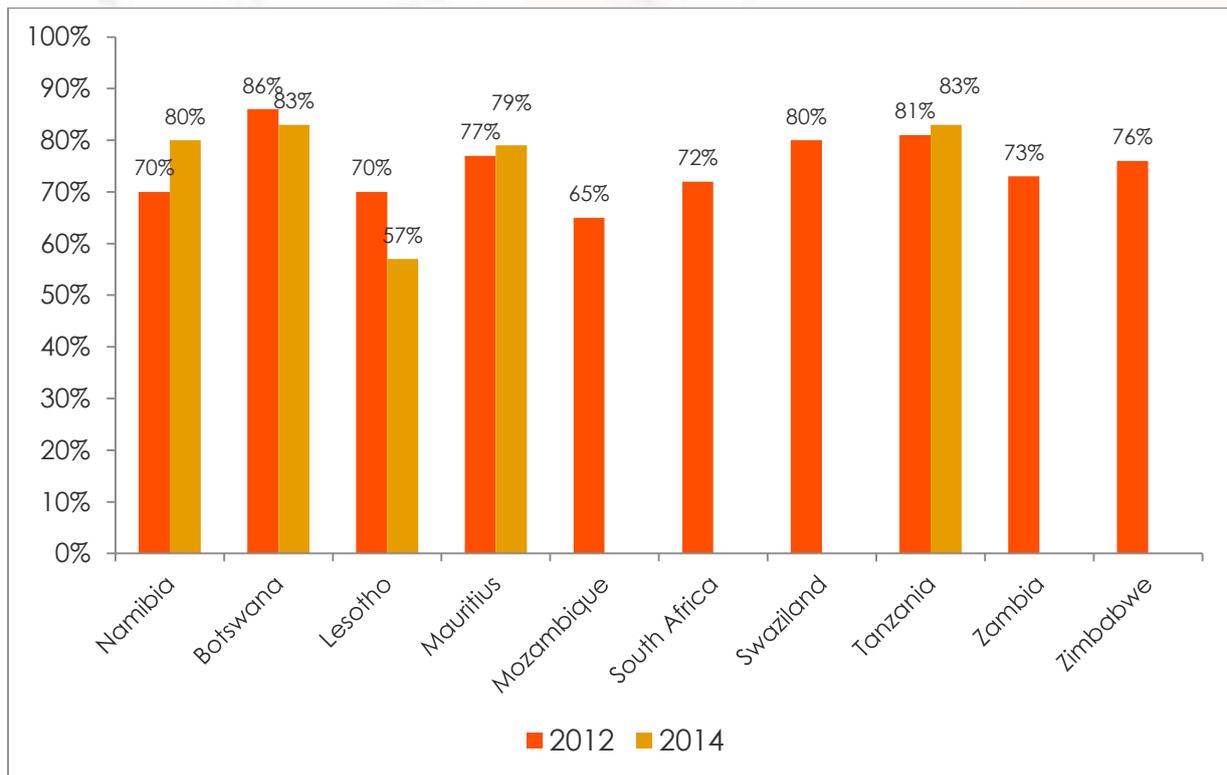
“frequently” or “occasionally” vs. 76% of men), partake in civic action, and contact their leaders to call their attention to certain issues or share their ideas.

- About one in seven women (14%) and one in 12 men (8%) report that they or family members were victims of GBV during the past year. Overwhelmingly (87%), Namibians say alcohol abuse contributes “a lot” to GBV. Other factors that were cited include unemployment (68%), poverty (64%), and culture/tradition (27%).

Namibians support women in political leadership

Like most citizens in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Namibians express high levels of support for women in political leadership, with 80% agreeing that “Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.” This support grew from 70% in 2012 to 80% in 2014 – the largest leap upward among SADC countries, two of which (Botswana and Lesotho) showed declining levels of support (Figure 1). Afrobarometer data shows that in Namibia, support for women in political leadership is higher amongst women (86%) than amongst men (73%), though it has been growing amongst both sexes (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Support for women's political leadership | by SADC country | 2012-2014



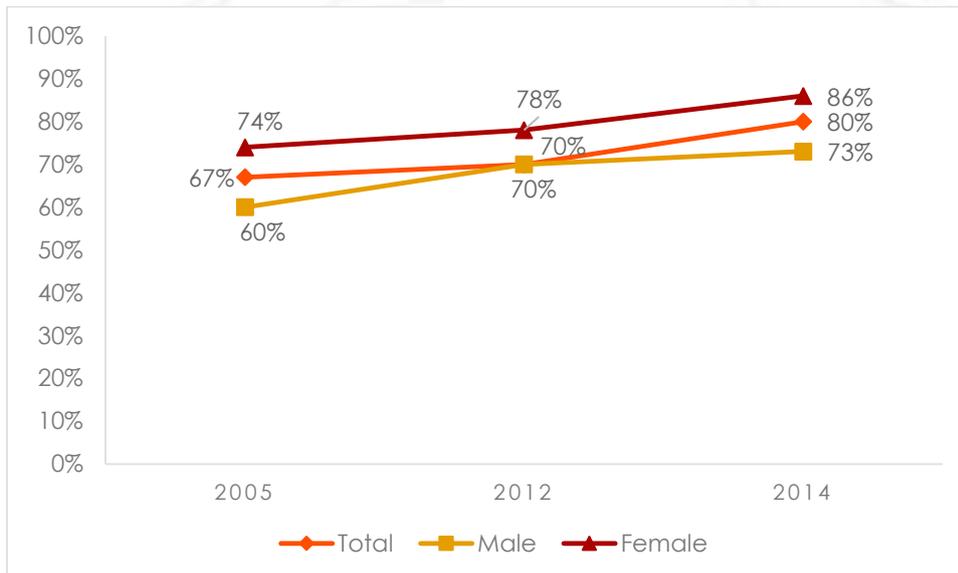
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.

Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men. (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 2)

(Note: Results from the 2014 surveys in Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are not yet available.)

Figure 2: Support for women's political leadership | by gender | Namibia
 | 2005-2014



(Note: The question assessing support for women in political leadership was not asked in the 1999, 2003, and 2008 Afrobarometer rounds.)

Despite support for women in political leadership, the representation of women in Parliament, cabinet, and local government across the SADC remains relatively poor, and no country has reached the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development's target that "at least 50% of decision-making positions in the private and public sector are held by women" by 2015.

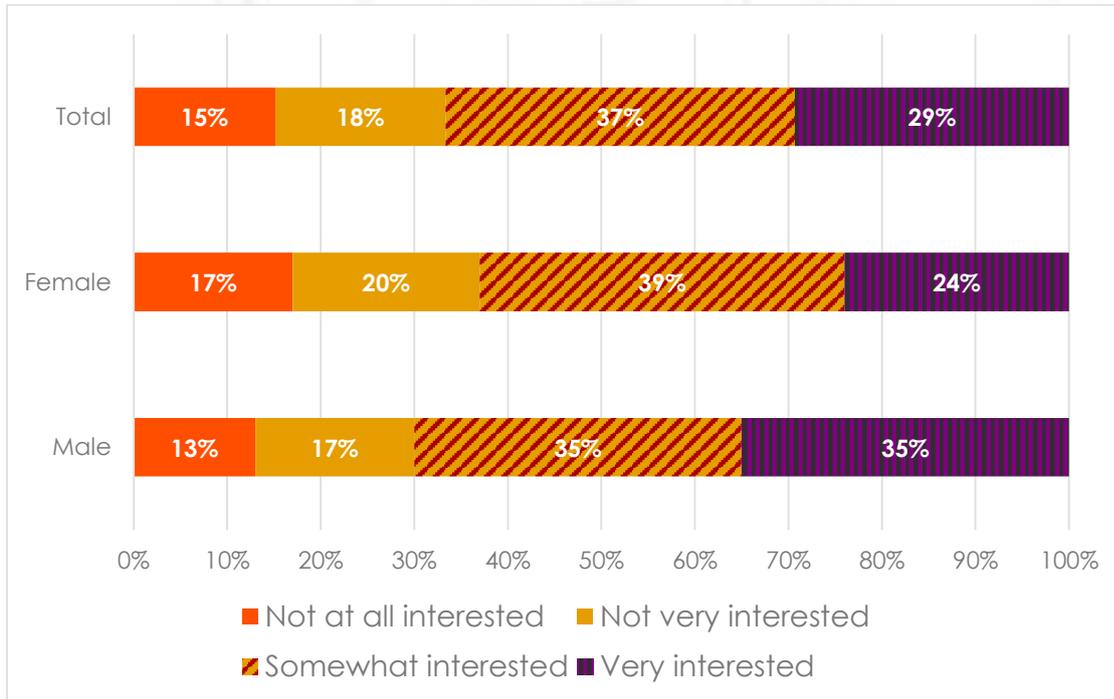
Namibia's legal framework is strongly supportive of the participation of women in governance and decision-making. The National Gender Policy and the Gender Plan of Action are supported by a plethora of other policies, ratified regional and international instruments, and the Constitution itself.

In practice, however, it was only in 2015 that Namibia surpassed 30% women's leadership at the national level, thanks primarily to an amendment to the constitution of the leading party, SWAPO, requiring a "zebra list" quota system alternating male and female candidates on the party list. This ensured 50/50 gender representation by the party in the 2014 National Assembly elections, which raised women's representation in the new National Assembly from 26% to 41%. At local levels, Namibia has always performed better (with about 42% women's representation since 1997) due to longstanding quotas.

Women less interested in politics

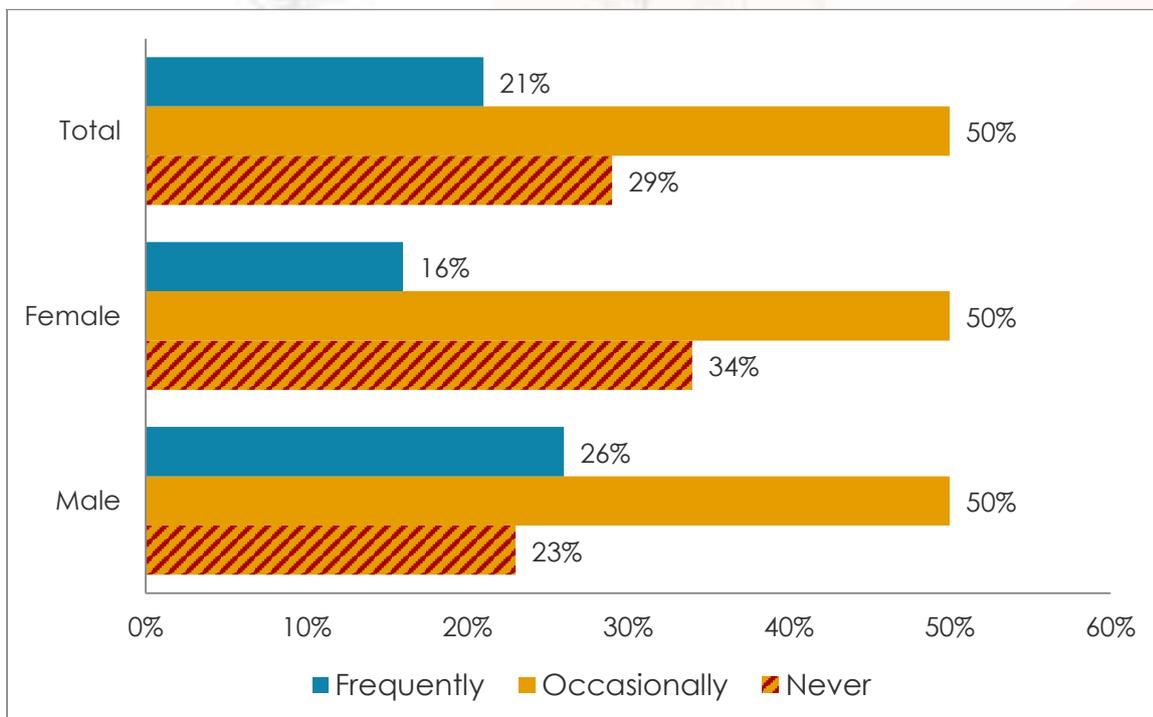
Although Namibian women show greater levels of support than men for women in political leadership, Afrobarometer data shows that women are less interested in public affairs than their male counterparts: 63% of women say they are "somewhat" or "very" interested in public affairs, compared to 70% of men (Figure 3). Women also discuss politics less frequently than men (66% vs. 76%) (Figure 4). Whilst interest in politics is rather strong across both sexes, differences in political engagement are generally consistent with trends across the continent, perhaps reflecting gendered socialisation in various cultural contexts. Interest in public affairs and the discussion of politics have, however, been growing since 2008 amongst both men and women (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 3: Interest in public affairs | by gender | Namibia | 2014



Respondents were asked: How interested would you say you are in public affairs?

Figure 4: Discuss politics | by gender | Namibia | 2014



Respondents were asked: When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters?

Figure 5: Interest in public affairs over time | by gender | Namibia | 2001-2014

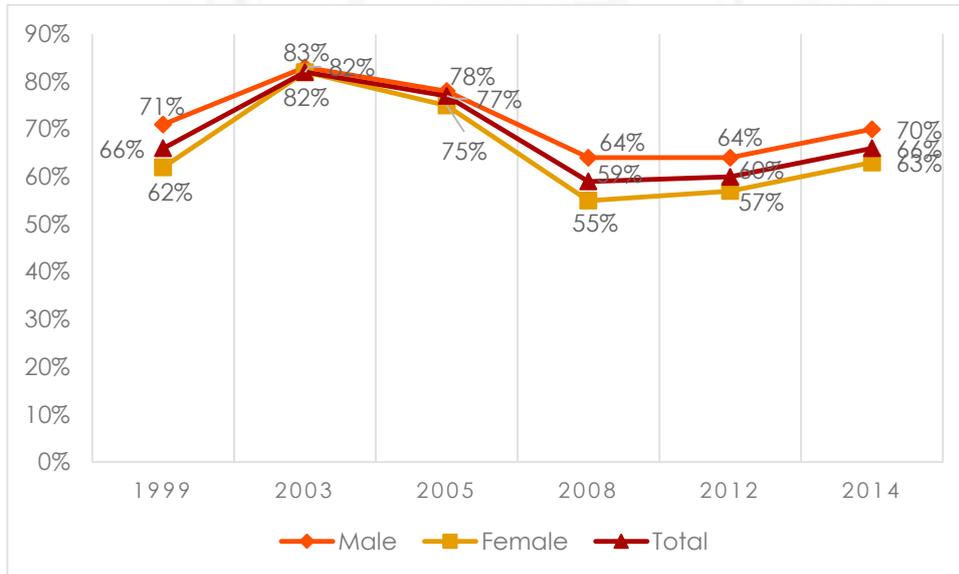
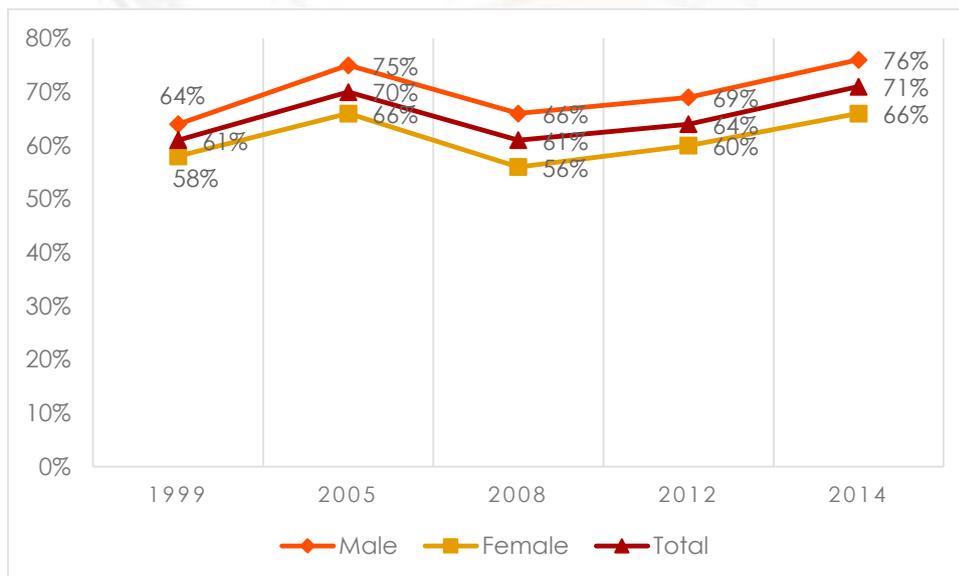


Figure 6: Discuss politics over time | by gender | Namibia | 1999-2014



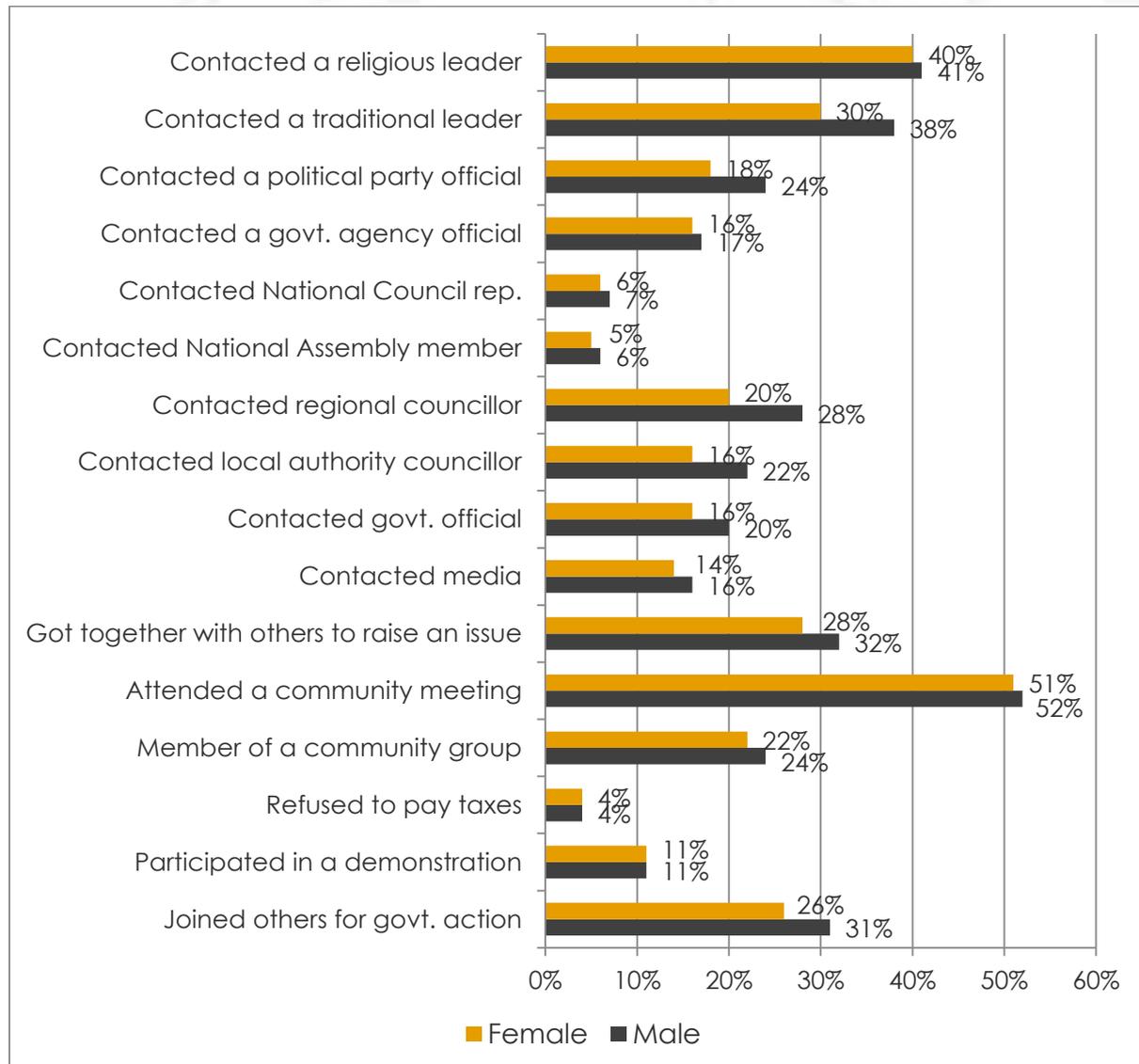
(% who say "frequently" or "occasionally")

Women less active in civic affairs

In addition to expressing less interest in politics, Namibian women report slightly lower levels of participation in certain community and political activities. These include joining others to request action from government, contacting government officials to highlight problems or make a complaint, and contacting regional and local councillors, traditional leaders, and political party officials to address a problem or to share their views (Figure 7).

Namibian women are just as likely as men, however, to participate in demonstrations/protest marches and to be members of community groups. They were also slightly more likely than men to register to vote in the 2014 elections. (Registrants were 53% women, slightly more than the 51.6% women in the 2011 census.)

Figure 7: Involvement in community/political activities | by gender | Namibia | 2014



Respondents were asked:

1. During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A regional councillor? A member of the National Assembly? A National Council representative? An official of a government agency? A political party official? Traditional leaders? Religious leader? (% who responded "only once," "a few times," or "often")
2. Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens when they are dissatisfied with government. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Contacted the media, like calling a radio program or writing a letter to a newspaper? Contacted a government official to ask for help or make a complaint? Refused to pay a tax or fee to government? Participated in a demonstration or protest march? Joined with others in your community to request action from government?
3. Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? Got together with others to raise an issue?
4. Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: Some other voluntary association or community group?

Experience of violence and fear

Gender-based violence – predominantly with women as victims – has been a major cause for concern in Namibia, with reports on “passion killing,” rape, and abuse making frequent headlines. In 2012, the government launched the National Plan of Action on GBV 2012-2016 to complement its Gender Plan of Action and to reinforce existing legislation (e.g. the Combating of Rape Act 8 of 2000 and the Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003) and various instruments on GBV to which Namibia is signatory. The plan aims to “reduce GBV as a result of prevention initiatives,” “improve services for survivors of GBV,” “increase understanding of GBV in Namibia,” and create “more efficient interventions as a result of improved coordination and monitoring.”

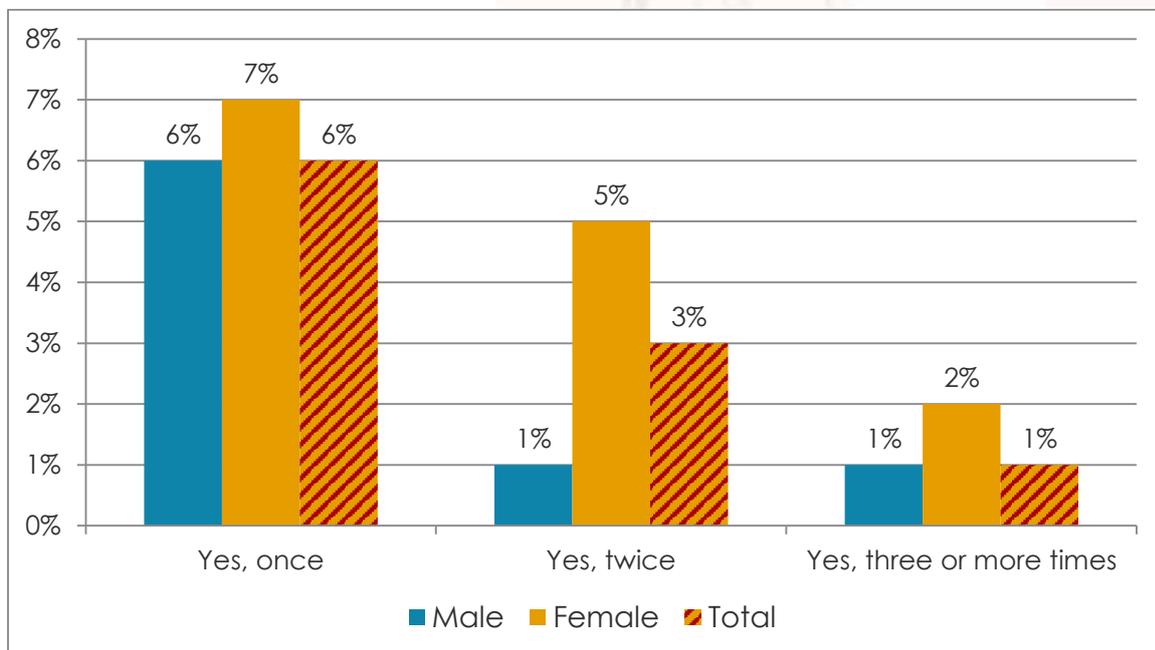
The subject of GBV has emerged several times in parliamentary discussions, and on March 6, 2014, the government led a National Day of Prayer against Gender-Based Violence.

During Afrobarometer Round 6 surveys, Namibian respondents were asked about the experience of GBV and reasons for GBV.

About one in seven women (14%) and one in 12 men (8%) say that they or family members were victims of GBV in the past year (Figure 8); 7% of women and 2% of men say this occurred two or more times.

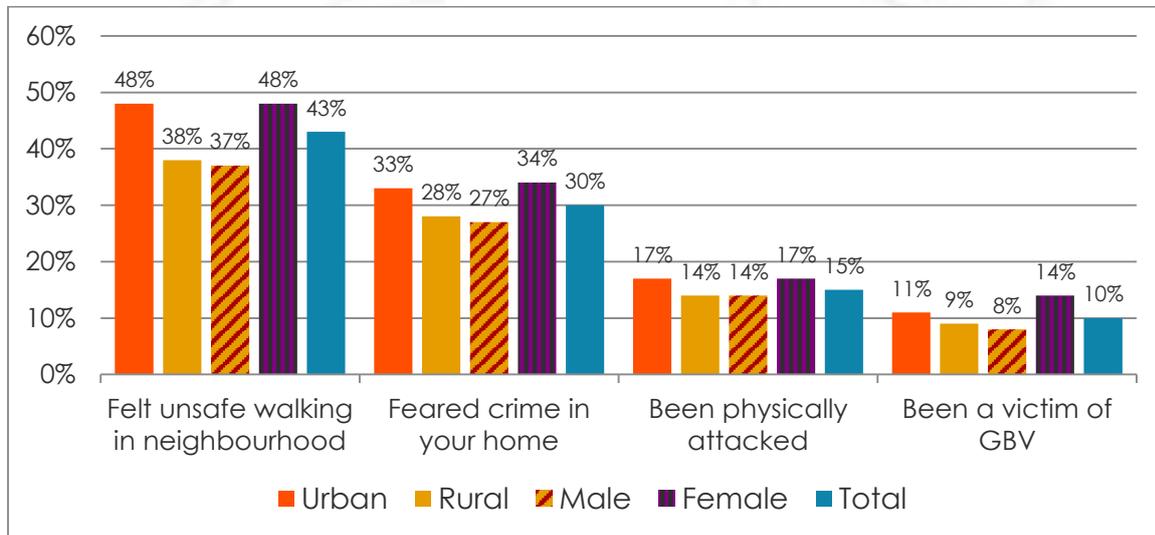
Perhaps reflecting a greater incidence of GBV against women than against men, female respondents express greater levels of feeling unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods (48% of women vs. 37% of men) and fear of crime in their home (34% vs. 27%). Fear of crime and the experience of being a victim of physical attack or GBV are somewhat higher in urban areas than in rural areas (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Victim of gender-based violence | by gender | Namibia | 2014



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Been a victim of gender-based violence?

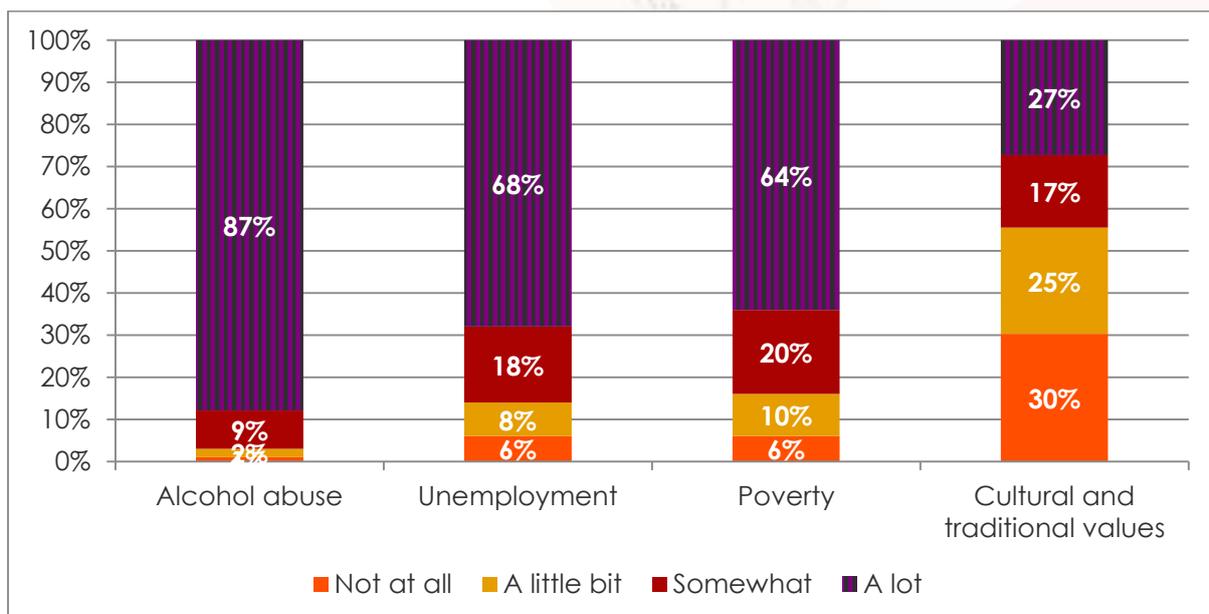
Figure 9: Fear of crime and experience of physical attack and GBV | by gender and location | Namibia | 2014



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home? Been physically attacked? Been a victim of gender-based violence? (% who say one or more times)

To gain insight into what Namibians believe are the reasons for GBV, respondents were asked how much unemployment, alcohol abuse, poverty, and culture/tradition contribute to the high level of GBV in Namibia. Alcohol abuse is perceived as a major contributing factor: 87% of Namibians say it contributes “a lot” to GBV. Cultural and traditional values are not perceived to be a leading factor, with 30% of respondents saying that they do “not at all” contribute to this form of violence.

Figure 10: Factors contributing to GBV | Namibia | 2014



Respondents were asked: The government has recently expressed serious concern about the crime of gender-based violence in Namibia. In your opinion, how much, if at all, does each of the following factors contribute to gender-based violence in this country, or haven't you heard enough about it to say: Cultural and traditional values? Alcohol abuse? Poverty? Unemployment?

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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