



Photo: Democracy Report

**ABSENT OPPOSITION ...** The National Assembly ended its 2022 business in November 2022 with the opposition benches largely empty due to a walkout by opposition MPs on 9 November over what they claimed was verbal abuse by ruling party MP, Hon. Veikko Nekundi, and biased handling of the situation by the Speaker, Hon. Prof. Peter Katjavivi.

## Perceptions of parliament from Afrobarometer

**Public perceptions of the Namibian Parliament continue to trend negative in most respects and reflect a broader decline in trust in political and government institutions over the years.**

The favourability of democracy as a form of governance and government in Namibia continues to decline, according to the Round 9 results of the influential Afrobarometer survey.

In the 2021 survey, the latest results of which were released on 19 September 2022, just about 55% of surveyed Namibians favoured democracy, which is a drop of about one percentage point from the Round 8 survey, in which (a still low) over 56% were in favour of democracy.

This declining favourability of democracy was concerningly underscored by the fact that 60% of surveyed Namibians were of the

opinion that it would be “legitimate for the armed forces to take control of government when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends”.

Similarly, perceptions of institutions at the heart of Namibian democracy – especially the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia – also reflect low favourability among Namibians in general.

However, despite this general low regard for democracy and the disturbing support for military rule, over 70% of surveyed Namibians expressed a preference for having democratic elections and an elected parliament. This seems to suggest that the favourability of democracy is viewed through general negative perceptions of the performance and legitimacy of the current and previous governments and iterations of the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, consisting of the National Assembly (NA) and National Council (NC).

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## Trust and integrity

A majority of Afrobarometer Round 9 respondents expressed distrust in the National Assembly, with roughly 51% saying that they had no or little trust in the institution. The same was true of the National Council, with about 52% of respondents saying that they had no or little trust in the institution.

These high levels of distrust are further underscored by general negative perceptions of the performance of Members of Parliament (MPs), with just about 48% of respondents approving or strongly approving of the performance of NA members, and just about 49% approving or strongly approving of the performance of NC members.

Also contributing to these high levels of distrust are negative perceptions of the integrity of MPs in general, with over 75% of respondents expressing the belief that most or many NA members were corrupt and 77% believing the same of NC members.

Taken together, these statistics indicate that the institution of the Namibian Parliament is tainted as weak and corrupt, and not serving the public interest.

At the same time, Afrobarometer respondents perceived Namibian voters as largely powerless and thus not responsible for holding MPs and the institutions of parliament accountable, with just about 29% saying that it was the responsibility of voters to ensure that "once elected, members of the National Assembly do their jobs".

Respondents saw it as mostly the responsibility of the presidency and Executive to hold MPs and the institutions of parliament accountable.

This perceived powerlessness of Namibian voters to hold MPs accountable is also expressed in the fact that about 75% of respondents believe Members of the National Assembly do not listen enough to "what ordinary people have to say" and actually have very little official contact with voters and ordinary Namibians in general – suggesting that MPs do not consider themselves accountable to "ordinary people".

This situation is arguably a consequence of the fact that Namibian voters do not directly elect their parliamentarians, but rather vote for a political party through the proportional representation electoral system. Under this system parliamentary candidates are seated according to a party list, the compilation of which the average Namibian voter has absolutely no power to influence.

## Accountability and transparency

However, even though Afrobarometer respondents mostly perceived Namibian voters and ordinary citizens as largely powerless in terms of political influence, decision-making and accountability, they did express the belief and expectation that Namibian voters should have more power to hold political office-bearers and government officials accountable.

For instance, almost 80% of respondents stated that "government is like the people's employee" and that it "should respect citizens and do what they request".

In the same vein, about 65% of respondents were of the view that it was "more important for citizens to be able to hold the government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly".

This of course also translates to higher expectations of the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, with about 68% of surveyed Namibians being of the view that the "National Assembly should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money".

This is probably with reference to the general impression that to date the Namibian Parliament has not been an effective check on Executive power, largely due to the ruling party having enjoyed a two-thirds parliamentary majority for most of the last three decades. Over this period the Namibian Parliament has largely been perceived

to have served as a rubber-stamp of Executive decisions and actions.

In terms of who MPs and the Namibian Parliament should be answerable to, just over 68% of respondents believe that "elected officials should listen to voters' views and do what they demand".

## General low views

In the final analysis, the views expressed by survey respondents indicate that ordinary Namibians perceive themselves as not having much, if any, political power or influence beyond their right to vote.

At the same time they perceive political institutions, such as the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, as disconnected from the realities of ordinary Namibians and not serving the public interest. This is probably largely why democracy scored such a low favourability, because of the perception that it is not tangibly delivering for many or most Namibians.

The high levels of distrust in the institutions of parliament, along with the low views of MPs' performances and integrity, tracks general long-standing negative perceptions of the performance and integrity of Namibian government institutions and officialdom, that also surface once again in the Round 9 results.

While public perceptions should not be held up as facts, surveys such as Afrobarometer should be viewed as valuable and illuminating guides to what the public thinks of the state of Namibian politics and society.



## About Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life.

The Afrobarometer National Partner in Namibia, Survey Warehouse, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Namibians between 31 October and 16 November 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Namibia in 1999, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019.

[https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NAM\\_R9.Summary-of-Results\\_19sep22.pdf](https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NAM_R9.Summary-of-Results_19sep22.pdf)

# Trust & Integrity

How much do Namibians trust the institution of parliament, as well as the Members of Parliament, and how do they perceive the levels of integrity of National Assembly and National Council members?



**Just over 5 out of 10 Namibians (51%)**

have no or very little trust in the National Assembly.



**Just over 5 out of 10 Namibians (52%)**

have no or very little trust in the National Council.



**Just over 4 out of 10 Namibians (44%)**

disapprove or strongly disapprove of the performance of Members of the National Assembly ...



**While just less than 5 out of 10 Namibians (48%)**

approve or strongly approve of the performance of Members of the National Assembly.



**Just over 4 out of 10 Namibians (43%)**

disapprove or strongly disapprove of the performance of Members of the National Council ...



**While just less than 5 out of 10 Namibians (49%)**

approve or strongly approve of the performance of Members of the National Council.



**Just over 7 out of 10 Namibians (75%)**

think that some or most Members of the National Assembly are involved in corruption.



**Almost 8 out of 10 Namibians (77%)**

think that some or most Members of the National Council are involved in corruption.

Source: Afrobarometer Round 9. Results for Namibia released on 19 September 2022.

# Democracy & Accountability

What impression do Namibians have of the state of democracy and the accountability of elected politicians and political institutions responsible for ensuring democracy serves the interests of the people?

Over **70%**  
of Namibians are in favour of democratic  
elections and having a parliament ...

... even though just **55%**  
of Namibians regard democracy as preferable to  
non-democratic forms of government.

Less than **50%**  
of Namibians were fairly or very satisfied with  
how democracy works in Namibia.

About **68%**  
of Namibians don't believe Namibia is a full  
democracy, but one with major and minor  
problems.

About **35%**  
of Namibians feel the country is less democratic  
than five years ago ...

... while about **39%**  
think that democracy is about the same  
as it was five years ago.

About **65%**  
of Namibians are of the view that it is "more  
important for citizens to be able to hold the  
government accountable, even if that means it  
makes decisions more slowly".

About **68%**  
of Namibians are of the view that the "National  
Assembly should ensure that the president  
explains to it on a regular basis how his  
government spends taxpayers' money".

Just over **68%**  
of Namibians believe that "elected officials should  
listen to voters' views and do what they demand".

**75%**  
of Namibians believe Members of the National  
Assembly don't listen enough to "what ordinary  
people have to say".

Just **29%**  
of Namibians are of the view that voters  
are responsible for "making sure that, once  
elected, members of the National  
Assembly do their jobs" ...

While **43%**  
believe it is the responsibility of the  
President and the Executive.

Almost **41%**  
of Namibians are of the view that the voters are  
responsible for ensuring that, "once elected, the  
president does his job" ...

While just over **20%**  
believe it is the responsibility of Parliament.

Source: Afrobarometer Round 9. Results for Namibia released on 19 September 2022.