

NAMIBIA

André du Pisani and William A. Lindeke

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Namibia has an executive president with substantial power and authority, so constituting a presidential system. The president appoints the prime minister and cabinet from among members of the bicameral parliament – the National Assembly and the National Council. Presidents (except for the first one) are limited to two terms of five years. In 1999 SWAPO was able to secure an amendment to the constitution which allowed a third term but only for the country's first president, Sam Nujoma. The liberation movement which was called the South West Africa Peoples Organization or SWAPO officially became the "SWAPO Party of Namibia" during the 1989 Constituent Assembly election and has remained such for the past 20 years. President Nujoma won 75 per cent of the votes in that year's election.

Political system

In 2004 Nujoma's chosen successor, Lucas Hifikepunye Pohamba, was selected to be SWAPO's presidential candidate, and he won a similar percentage in the national election of that year. This was after winning a bitter contest within SWAPO between three candidates at an extraordinary party congress. That contest caused what seems to be a minor rift in the ruling party with the formation of a breakaway party, the Rally for Democracy and Progress, similar to the situation in 1999 with the rise of the Congress of Democrats.¹

Regular elections are held for different levels of government and have been characterized by reasonably high turnouts, above 80 per cent (except the 1998 regional and local elections). These are multiparty elections featuring generally open competition at all three levels. The president is the dominant political figure selected through a one-round, direct election process² (a second round takes place in the event that he or she does not obtain 50 per cent plus one vote) in which most of the major opposition parties advance their leading candidates, gaining only small shares of the votes in the process. In 1999 three opposition candidates shared 23 per cent of the vote, while in 2004 six candidates shared 23 per cent of the presidential ballots. Presidential candidates must be Namibian citizens over 35 years old and have to be nominated in accordance with the parties' internal statutes (or equivalent requirements if they are independent candidates), in order to stand for president.

The Namibian constitution was written by the Constituent Assembly after the United Nations' supervision of independence elections in 1989 under UNSCR 435. Chapter 3, which is called "Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms", forms the "entrenched rights" (so established by article 131) which are the political foundation of the constitution. This means that the articles may only be strengthened or left alone, but neither weakened nor deleted. Only one amendment (allowing the founding president a third term) has been made to the constitution, although additional minor amendments on citizenship and other issues were working through the legislative process in 2009. A two-thirds majority is required in each parliamentary chamber or, lacking that, the president may call a referendum, requiring a two-thirds majority of the votes in order to change ordinary articles in the constitution.

Constitution

The constitution is widely praised as one of the most liberal in Africa, creating an institutional environment for a robust democratic political system with adequate checks and balances and solid protections for basic rights. Chapter 3 contains 20 separate articles, reflecting a concern for protection against past abuses and incorporating consensus protections from UN and African rights documents. Key protections among the 20 articles include issues around arrest and trial, political participation (including political parties), property and non-discrimination. The provisions of article 23 allow for "Affirmative Action" to redress inequalities resulting from apartheid colonialism without violating article 10 on non-discrimination. Article 23 also gives special status to women in terms of affirmative action.

Article 21 ("Fundamental Freedoms") contains ten personal rights to speech, belief, religion, assembly, association, movement, residence and work. These rights and freedoms have been reflected in legal and political practice in Namibia. On the rare occasion when constitutional issues have been raised, the document has stood the test. The courts have taken some decisions against the ruling party or the executive.

The general practice has been to abide by the constitution and the law. This is made easier by the overwhelming majority that SWAPO commands at the polls and in parliament. SWAPO's majority in the National Assembly means that the government is able through informal means to control the work and legislation of parliament while still following constitutional procedures.

In the 2006 Afrobarometer National Opinion Survey³, 54 per cent of respondents said they "agree" and 15 per cent "strongly agree" that the constitution expresses the values and hopes of the Namibian people (IDASA 2006). A similar percentage said that "the courts have the right to make decisions that the people always have to abide by" (ibid.). This gives a solid popular base to constitutional principles and the rule of law.

No permanent special rights are given to political parties through the constitution. Party lists are the electoral basis for determining who will serve in the National Assembly. The party "owns" the seat and may alter the list or replace sitting members as their procedures allow. This constitutional feature empowers the party leadership at the expense of elected members of parliament (MPs). By negotiating with backbenchers and by threatening to replace them if they deviate from party policy, the party leadership keeps MPs in line. This centralises power within parties and greatly strengthens party discipline in both ruling and opposition parties.

State of democracy Namibia has one of the most respected democracies in Africa. Opposition parties, the print and electronic media, and civil society are well protected, though weak in the face of a one party dominant system (similar to South Africa and Botswana). The rule of law is well established and respected. Elections are free and fair according to established procedures, international observers, and public opinion, with 81 per cent saying the 2004 election was "free and fair or with minor problems" (IDASA 2009). Seventy-three per cent of Afrobarometer respondents believe that Namibia is a "full democracy or one with only minor problems". Sixty-seven per cent are "very or fairly satisfied" with democracy in Namibia. These three measures are above average for the 19 reforming countries with Afrobarometer surveys (Little/Logan 2009).

Additionally, trust in the president, at 81 per cent, is one of the highest among those countries surveyed. Trust in other government institutions is also above average, as is trust in the ruling party (Little/Logan 2009; IDASA 2009). Namibia rates high in the "supply of democracy", while "demand for democracy" by the public is relatively low. This suggests that democratic values are not yet firmly established in the public consciousness but instead rely on commitment by the elite.

Namibia has been a high performing constitutional democracy since gaining independence in March 1990. Political stability has characterized the regime combining, paradoxically, one-party domination of the political outcome and healthy democratic practices. Namibia ranks among

the top five to ten African countries in international measures of policy and performance (UNECA Policy Index, World Bank Governance Matters Index, Mo Ibrahim Governance Index, and the World Economic Forum Global Competitive Index and Transparency International).

The executive commands a clear majority in the National Assembly⁴, and thus dominates the legislative process to the detriment of openness and transparency. Party "ownership" of the seats reinforces party discipline, although the National Council does sometimes send important legislation back for reconsideration. Legislative committees are generally weak except for the Public Accounts Committee, which receives good television coverage, but does not have any real power.

Public support for government policies is also generally strong, assisting the electoral fortunes of the ruling party. The exceptions have been in the reduction of unemployment and poverty, where the public thinks that the government has done "fairly to very badly" (Little/Logan 2009). The GINI index for Namibia, which measures income inequality between rich and poor, is one of the worst in the world at 6.0 (National Planning Commission 2009). The public also ranks the current economic conditions in the country as being good, again among the highest in the Afrobarometer rankings (Little/Logan 2009) and benefiting SWAPO's electoral performance. Even though poverty and unemployment are severe, there has been some considerable progress in reducing poverty, increasing visible government spending, and achieving positive, real economic growth in every year (except one) since independence. Perhaps the remaining problems are a measure of how far Namibia still needs to progress to overcome the apartheid past. The government receives generally good marks from the public and the external evaluators mentioned earlier.

Civil society is relatively weak and sidelined by the huge majority held by SWAPO at national, regional and local levels and the effectiveness of incumbency, but it does make an effort. Media freedom is extensive with multiple print and electronic outlets including government ones; the availability of radio in several languages is especially important (MISA 2008).

The main changes over the past five years have centred on the role of the founding president. President Sam Nujoma served without interruption as president of the country, and, for nearly fifty years, was the first and only president of the SWAPO Party and Movement. In 2004 he stepped aside, and his chosen successor, Hifikepunye Pohamba, was elected as Namibia's second president. In 2005 President Nujoma was declared "Father of the Nation" by legislative act, and also stepped aside as president of the party in favour of President Pohamba.

As a result of intra-party factionalism in the ruling party over succession issues, the SWAPO leadership has faced considerable factionalism and disunity. The succession contest for president of the republic resulted in the isolation and eventual splitting away in 2007 of Hidipo Hamutenya's faction of SWAPO to form the Rally for Democracy and Progress. The crux of the divisions seems to be the concentration of actual power in the hands of former President Nujoma and those in his favour.

Additional conflicts seem to be simmering between some elements of the party leadership and the leadership of the SWAPO Youth League. Factionalism seems to be developing around the party list for the coming election, the cabinet posts which will follow the elections, and succession manoeuvres for the 2014 election. SWAPO's chances of winning the next election seem quite secure according to the 2008 Afrobarometer survey (IDASA 2009).

The separation of powers is an inherent principle of the Namibian constitution. The checks and balances are stipulated in various articles of the constitution (especially article 1). The different functions of each organ of the state are clearly defined in the constitution.

*Separation
of powers*

The executive is divided between a dominant executive president and a prime minister. In 2004 the Cabinet Secretariat was relocated to State House, giving the president much more formal

power than in the past. However, the current president rules by consensus within cabinet and does not seem to misuse the powers at his disposal. The party structures exercise a considerable amount of power over government in terms of policy and personnel and through the priorities of the election manifesto.

Namibia is a unitary state with three levels of elected government. Some decentralization has taken place since the mid-1990s, and more is scheduled in the near future. However, the ruling party controls most of the seats in government (29 out of 46 local authorities with 14 having no clear majority; and 96 out of 107 regional council seats). Political party control is more important through informal channels. After 27 years of armed struggle to gain control of government, SWAPO's national leadership was in no hurry to give that power to others. A delimitation process created 13 new regions in 1992 in line with the requirements of the constitutional compromises. However, the regions are effectively controlled by the central government through budget allocations.

The bicameral legislature is made up of two chambers, the 72-member National Assembly and the 26-member National Council as a house of review. Cabinet dominates the votes and power in lawmaking through sheer numbers, thus diminishing the real power of the legislative branch.

The National Assembly of parliament features a party list system for the 72 voting members with the "lowest remainder" method. Six additional, non-voting members are appointed by the president. Regional councils are elected by constituency, and each regional council selects two of its members to serve on the National Council. Local authorities are elected "at large" from a party list system. The local party lists are required to have at least 30 per cent women, resulting in more than 40 per cent of elected councillors being female. It is noteworthy that political parties are not allowed to make changes to their lists once these have been submitted to the Electoral Commission on nomination day (in South Africa this is allowed).

The judiciary has three branches: the Supreme Court, the High Court (Appeals), and magistrates. The resources and experience are thin at this stage of independence, requiring foreign judges to be used at higher levels more often than is desired. These judges have been intimidated on occasion, but remain generally independent and professional. Magistrates and other court personnel have been undergoing training since independence, but the justice system has problems from the lowest level to the highest with backlogs and a slow process.

National assembly The National Assembly (NA) is the basic lawmaking and policy debating arena. Its 72 voting members are elected on a party list/proportional representation system. An additional six non-voting members are appointed by the president. The NA serves a five year term. Since independence, the cabinet (ministers and deputy ministers) have constituted an absolute majority of the NA, and thus dominate the chamber in a way that undermines the separation of executive and legislative authorities. This means that laws and policy are made in the secrecy of cabinet meetings, and then defended and passed on the floor of the NA.

With such an automatic majority, legislation and debate can be tightly controlled whenever desired. For example, the budget debates have never altered a single cent of revenue or expenditure and are more of a political opportunity for opposition parties to raise issues to score political points. Obviously, these budget "debates" last longer in election years. Inconvenient measures raised by the opposition (such as the missing detainee issue) can be quickly stopped by the SWAPO majority. Nonetheless, opposition party members can raise important points and issues to embarrass the government or highlight election or governance issues.

Provisions have been made, following reform proposals in 1996, to make the committees of parliament stronger and more active. A major limitation of the committees is the small number of opposition and backbench members, which stretches their duties thinly across several committees. Combined with a small and minimally skilled staff, these committees have not added quality to the legislative process as had been hoped.⁵

Table 1 | ELECTORAL RESULTS (PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS) AND DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY⁽¹⁾

Party	Latest election (2004)	Present status	Prior to latest election (1999)
SWAPO Party of Namibia (SWAPO)	75.8% 55 seats plus 6 non-voting	PP, PPM/GA	76% 55 seats plus 6 non-voting
Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP)	NA	NR	NA
DTA of Namibia (DTA)	5.1% 4 seats	O	9.5% 7 seats
Congress of Democrats (CoD)	7.3% 5 seats	O	10% 7 seats
Namibia Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO)	4.3% 3 seats	O	–
United Democratic Front (UDF)	3.7% 3 seats	O	3% 2 seats
Republican Party (RP)	2% 1 seat	O	NA
Monitor Action Group (MAG)	< 1% 1 seat	O	0.67% 1 seat
South West Africa National Union (SWANU)	0.5%	NR	NR
National Democratic Movement for Change (NMDC)	< 0.5%	NR	NA

⁽¹⁾Number of seats out of a total of 72 elected seats, plus 6 non-voting appointed by the president.

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | PPM/GA = party of the prime minister and sole party in government | O = party is in opposition | NR = no parliamentary representation
NA = not applicable – party was not formed or separately registered.

Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia. See also Hopwood 2007: 322–326.

The most important committee is that of Public Accounts, which is chaired by an opposition party member (thus far a very skilled and respected one). This committee reviews reports from the auditor general on spending by various government ministries, parastatals, and lower level governments. Their hearings are frequently covered by both the electronic and print media and feature more professional and non-partisan performances. It only has powers to make recommendations, however.

The National Council (NC) functions as a house of review and as yet has not introduced any legislation. Its members are selected from the elected regional councillors from the 13 regions. Each regional council has two members who are selected from their members to serve on the NC. The members serve for six-year terms.⁶

The National Council has spent much of its energy over the years establishing itself as a co-equal branch in terms of offices, pay, transport and respect. The current relations between the two chambers are harmonious, but only two opposition members serve in the upper chamber. Earlier relations between the bodies were more conflictual, with the NC claiming to be the only real check and balance on the executive. Several major pieces of legislation were rejected by the National Council and sent back to the National Assembly for reconsideration. Constitutional provisions for a presidential veto and parliamentary override do exist, but have never been exercised.

II. PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM

II.1 Party System

Legal regulation Political parties are allowed both legally and in practice. There are constitutional guarantees, acts of parliament and rules or codes of conduct by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) that regulate the conduct of political parties. Various components of these have been tested in the courts. The most important one that has involved both opposition and ruling parties has been over the control of seats in government, local authorities and parliament. The courts found, on appeal, that the political party, through its own statutes, will have determined the authority and procedure within the party to allocate the party's seats.

The constitutional and legal authority for political parties is very secure, even though the Electoral Commission only regulates the conduct of political parties during elections.

The basic Electoral Act, which regulates the tasks and the organization of political parties, was passed in 1992 with amendments in 1994, 1998 and 1999 (Lodge 1999). Another amendment is stuck at the Ministry of Regional, and Local Government and Housing after months of inaction. Among other things, this amendment allows for the local counting and posting of results, a critical issue after Zimbabwe's latest election. This legislation is needed for the 2009 elections but seems to lack an advocate in cabinet.

Parties are required to have a minimum number of registered voters signing a petition if the party list is to qualify for national elections. They must submit their party statutes, party colours and logo and show evidence of an executive committee, before they can formally register with the ECN. At local level 50 voters are needed to sign the petition, at regional level 100, and for national elections, at minimum 300 registered voters of at least ten regions, respectively. These standards apply both to parties and to independent candidates (Lodge 1999). The Regional Council Act 1992 (as amended) makes provision for independent regional councillors (to date, Namibia does not have a single independent regional councillor). Representatives of ratepayers' associations and other civic organizations or associations registered with the Electoral Commission can only hold seats at local government level, not at regional council level.

Seats are allocated on the basis of $1/72^{\text{nd}}$ of the votes cast or about 1.39 per cent, that is, the total votes are divided by the total elected seats to create a basis for an automatic allocation of most seats. After such allocation the remaining seats are allocated according to the highest remaining number of votes achieved by the parties until all of the seats are allocated. Sometimes a party will gain a seat with less than one per cent of the vote.

Additionally, parties must put forward at least 24 names on the National Assembly election list according to the Electoral Act and electoral regulations in the subsequent amendments (Lodge 1999).

Party financing In 1996 the parliament agreed to begin the public financing of political parties. A total of 0.2 per cent of the budget was allocated to political parties that were represented in the National Assembly on a basis proportional to the votes they received in the previous election. This means that SWAPO receives the lion's share now, amounting to over ND 13 million, and new parties receive nothing. New parties do not receive party funds from government till they are represented in the National Assembly. One of the shortcomings in the current practice of party funding is that no auditing is done of how government funds have been spent. This is a legal weakness that deserves to be addressed in the Electoral Act.

Table 2 | PARTY FINANCES FROM PUBLIC SOURCES (MILLIONS OF ND)

Party	2000– 2001	2001– 2002	2002– 2003	2003– 2004	2004– 2005	2005– 2006
Congress of Democrats (CoD)	1.25	1.4	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.0
DTA of Namibia-United Democratic Front coalition	1.57	1.8	2.3	2.4	2.0	NA
Monitor Action Group (MAG)	0.08	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
SWAPO Party of Namibia (SWAPO)	9.6	10.8	13.8	14.7	12.2	11.7
Republican Party (RP)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.2
DTA of Namibia (DTA)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.9
United Democratic Front (UDF)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.6
Namibia Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.6

Abbreviations: NA = not applicable – party was not formed or separately registered.

Source: Information provided by the Honourable Speaker's Office of the National Assembly, Windhoek, 4th June 2009. See also: IPPR 2009: 1–2.

Public funding comprises the vast majority of party funds. Membership fees, private companies owned by the parties, and donations are other sources of funding. International funds may be received, but are supposed to be declared when over ND 10,000. No effective monitoring of donations or expenditure has been developed due to concerns about secrecy and privacy. The auditor general (appointed by the president on the recommendation of the Public Service Commission) is supposed to do the monitoring.

In 2009, halfway through what is an election year, 13 political parties are officially registered according to the Electoral Commission of Namibia. Some other parties with very small followings may still exist outside the electoral framework. There are seven political parties with representation in parliament (compared to five in 1999) while a further few plus ratepayers' associations hold seats in regional councils or local authorities. Only seven parties have much of a following at the national level according to the 2008 Afrobarometer National Opinion Survey (IDASA 2009). These are in descending order of size:

Relevant parties

- SWAPO: SWAPO Party of Namibia (official name since 1989)
- RDP: Rally for Democracy and Progress (founded in 2007)
- DTA: DTA of Namibia
- NUDO: Namibia Unity Democratic Organization
- UDF: United Democratic Front
- CoD: Congress of Democrats
- APP: All Peoples Party.

The number of parties has increased over the past five years. During the 2004 election process, a number of new parties (or renewed parties such as the Republican Party and the Namibia Unity Democratic Organization) emerged to contest the polls. In 2007 and 2008 several more parties entered the fray, especially the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP). These parties usually split from the existing parties or alliances of parties. The largest of these (RDP) broke away from SWAPO in late 2007. It is unlikely that more than five or six of these will actually gain seats in 2009. The party list system and the seats that parties can gain by having the largest remainder of votes encourages smaller parties and discourages larger coalitions.

Party families Despite the ideological origins of the liberation struggle, in the post-independence period there is not much ideological content in Namibian politics. SWAPO concentrates on re-emphasizing the anti-colonial nationalist rhetoric while the opposition criticizes what government does. Some parties in opposition stress identity and fairness issues reflecting their voter base (e.g., NUDO), while others continue a progressive ideological sentiment (CoD) or have a greater emphasis on the private sector (e.g., RP).

SWAPO's commitment to democracy and a mixed economy blocks any sharp ideological fights. Some elements of SWAPO such as the Youth League or the party's newspaper (*Namibia Today*) continue an out-of-place leftist rhetoric seemingly at odds with official government policy.

Table 3 | IDEOLOGICAL COMPOSITION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

	Name and founding year	Present situation (2004)	Situation prior to the present (1999)
Social democratic/ liberation movement	SWAPO, 1960	PP, PPM/GA	PP, PPM/GA
Conservative	DTA, 1977	O	O
Technocratic/ social democratic	RDP, 2007	NR	NA
Conservative/ Ethnic	NUDO, 1964, but joined DTA coalition in 1977; re-emerged 2003	O	NA
Socialist International	CoD, 1999	O	O
Conservative/ Ethnic	UDF, 1989	O	O
Religious party (conservative Afrikaners – a small white minority)	MAG, 1991	O	O
Ethnic party	APP, 2007	NR	NA

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | PPM/GA = party of the prime minister and sole party in government | O = party is in opposition | NR = no parliamentary representation | NA = not applicable – party was not formed or separately registered.

Origins of parties The origin of parties in Namibia lies in the struggle for liberation, the extension of colonial or settler strategies for continued control, or recent splits from one of these.

Namibia has had a long history of elite circulation within and between political parties, even before independence. This elite circulation process has occasionally involved ideology or issues, but has most frequently centred around personalities and their relative prospects within the party or in government.

This has also been the case over the past five years. Individuals or older party fragments have broken with larger party alliances (DTA) to form or reform political parties. In some cases ethnic groups have formed the base of support for the new parties (such as the Kavango base of the All Peoples Party), as identity groups and elites tried to fashion a new relationship with SWAPO or the government. As in 1989 when there were more than 45 parties, the 2009 election should separate out the ones with no substantial following.

Political parties are formed to gain representation in the different levels of government. Some parties are better suited to contest local and regional constituency elections than national ones (the UDF in Damara areas for example). This is true for ethnic-based parties, parties with a local personalized following, or ratepayers' associations that do not contest elections nationally. Other parties contest elections nationally, but have strength in urban centres (especially in the capital, Windhoek), such as the CoD, and in regional ethnic strongholds, such as NUDO in Herero areas. These parties have more success in local authority and regional council elections than at national level, where they may pick up only a few seats. One example of this is the South West Africa National Union (SWANU), Namibia's oldest political party that holds one regional council seat in the Omaheke region. Only a few parties have anything like a national following. Primarily, this would include the ruling SWAPO Party of Namibia, the DTA of Namibia and perhaps the new Rally for Democracy and Progress. Opposition parties with no chance of becoming a "government in waiting" describe their role as providing a check on government and offering alternative policies.

*General
significance
of parties*

Most voters still have a loyalty to SWAPO as the party that brought independence. SWAPO also has established an effective governance track record, especially at the policy level. Thus, history and performance guide 75 per cent of voters to vote for the ruling party. To a degree, ethnic patterns of voting are entrenched over time, though all parties aspire to national agendas and followings. Among younger voters there seems to be a growing withdrawal from party politics, which reduces the significance of the historical roles of the different parties. Personalities, issues, and campaigns may become more important in the coming years. Voters for the smaller opposition parties, who are not committed ethnically, may be more likely to change their votes for tactical reasons, depending on the fortunes of the various contenders and any bandwagon effect.

*Voter-party
relations*

SWAPO has held on to its core voters in the north-central regions very solidly since independence. Smaller parties that are ethnic in terms of voter support, such as NUDO and the UDF, have also held up well among their voters. Government performance and the effective use of incumbency have helped SWAPO maintain and expand its national support. Urban and younger voters are less stable and perhaps less committed to political parties, especially in the capital. Many voters feel the politicians only come around during election time.

The Afrobarometer data from 2008 suggest that the respondents will vote in rough proportion to the past with about 9 per cent of voters opting for the new RDP party. These votes will mostly come from urban and younger voters.

The so called "born free generation" of voters, 18–24 year-olds, seems less inclined to be close to or identify with any given party. Up to 48 per cent of them do not feel close to any party and are significantly less interested in public matters according to the Round 4 data. Older voters and those with a strong ethnic party identification (especially to SWAPO) are less likely to change parties than are younger voters. Parties that are older appeal to older voters, who keep their party affiliations.

New parties such as the CoD and RDP struggle against these old loyalties to gain support. Certain areas and groups are more likely to switch parties for one reason or another, but they are relatively small groupings. Some white voters who were on the losing sides in the past may have also withdrawn from the electoral arena especially in the late 1990s.

II.2 Individual Parties

Namibian political parties keep membership statistics, but the practice is not to publicly disclose membership figures. Consequently, membership statistics are estimates projected from the respective electoral performance of the political parties. Actual membership is often significantly lower than electoral performance.

Party membership

Table 4a | MEMBERSHIP FIGURES⁽¹⁾

Party	2000	2009
SWAPO	Approximately 350,000	Approximately 600,000
RDP	The party did not exist in 2000	The party claimed a membership base of 250,000
DTA	50,000 (estimate)	30,000 (estimate)
CoD	52,000 (estimate)	25,000 (estimate)
NUDO	Not available	30,000 (estimate)
UDF	Not available	12,000 – 15,000 (estimate)
APP	Not available	8,000 (estimate)

⁽¹⁾ Based on estimates and claims by the parties.

Table 4b | TRENDS IN MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Party	Rising	Falling	Constant
SWAPO	■		
RDP	■		
DTA		■	
CoD		■	
NUDO			■
UDF			■
APP	■		

Namibia's political history generally, and the exile experience in particular, spawned a political leadership that emanates pre-eminently from the dominant ethnic group and from other ethnic groups and a core number of professions. The most important of these are: teaching, farming, churches, medicine, organized labour, commerce, law, and to a small extent engineering and technical areas. Of all the professions, teachers dominate.

The parties of Namibia are connected to different social strata. The SWAPO Party of Namibia is strongly connected to the bulk of civil servants, organized labour, the peasantry, a large proportion of the emerging and growing middle-class, young people and workers in the mining, fishing and small manufacturing sector.

The Congress of Democrats (CoD) draws almost all of its support from former supporters of the DTA of Namibia. These are predominantly employed in commercial agriculture, the professions (lawyers, medical doctors, architects) and the urban middle class.

The DTA of Namibia connects mostly with the white Namibian middle class, the predominantly European commercial agricultural sector, and some communal farmers, mostly in the south of the country.

The Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) is a middle-class party with some support from young people and the voters of the Ohangwena region (in the north of the country) where most of its senior leaders come from.

NUDO is essentially an ethnic party that draws its support from the Herero-speaking community, mostly in the communal (rural) areas.

The All People's Party (APP) draws its primary support from among younger voters (18–40 years) in the Kavango region in the north-east of the country, while the United Democratic Front (UDF) is essentially an ethnic party that draws its support from among the rural Damara-speaking population of the Kunene and Erongo regions.

All political parties in Namibia have party statutes and codes of conduct that regulate the behaviour of their members and their officials. Most parties also have disciplinary codes, while the more important parties have congresses, committees, branches and other structures to govern their affairs. *Party organization*

The more important and better endowed parties all have some or other organizational infrastructure at all three tiers of governance: central, regional and local. A fairly typical configuration is for parties to have national congresses, and in some cases, regional congresses, regional branches and local or constituency-based committees and branches. All the major parties have committees (such as on finance, policy, gender, and youth) to facilitate their operations. There are parties, such as the UDF and the APP, that do not have a presence in all 13 administrative regions of the country.

With the notable exception of the SWAPO Party of Namibia, the DTA and the newly-formed RDP, local and regional party structures are relatively inactive in the period between national and/or local and regional elections. The executive bodies of parties, such as their central committees and the Political Bureau (Politburo) in the case of SWAPO, attend to party affairs between elections.

All the bigger political parties in Namibia provide in their structures for youth and women's wings, among others. The Congress of Democrats, for example, has, in addition to its National Executive Committee, regional executive committees, and other structures, such as the Women Democrats and the Young Democrats. These are under a general secretary.

The SWAPO Party of Namibia has an elaborate party structure. The Central Committee comprises 64 members. The Political Bureau (Politburo) is "the steering committee of the Central Committee", according to the party statute. It is made up of 21 members – the party's president, vice-president, secretary general and deputy secretary general, plus 17 persons elected by the Central Committee from its membership. SWAPO also has a youth council (officially SWAPO Party Youth League), a women's council (SWAPO Party Women's Council) and an elders' council (SWAPO Party Elders' Council). In addition, there is a young pioneers' movement and SWAPO is formally affiliated to the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), a federation comprising 11 unions.

The DTA of Namibia has the Congress as its principal policymaking body, a management committee consisting of the president, vice-president, chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary general. The Central Committee, which is the highest executive body of the DTA, consists of the president, vice-president, chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary general, the secretaries for youth, women, finance, organization and information, members of parliament (MPs), regional councillors, local councillors, for representatives of each of the affiliated parties, six members of each regional committee, two representatives from the Women's League, and four representatives from the Chiefs' Council.

The National Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO) has a congress as its highest decision-making body, The Central Committee, the party's highest decision-making body between congresses, comprising the National Bureau, all traditional leaders who are members of NUDO, regional chairpersons, the secretary generals of the party's wings – the Elders' Council, Youth Wing and Women's Council – and six presidential advisors. The National Bureau formulates policy between Central Committee meetings.

The newly formed Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) has a congress as its principal policy-making body, a youth and women's council and regional and local committees.

The United Democratic Front (UDF), too, has a youth wing, while the Congress of Democrats (COD) has the Young Democrats.

Notwithstanding the relatively elaborate democratic structures of most of the larger Namibian political parties, core policy and other strategic decisions emanated from their executive structures, such as their central committees, politburos and National Bureau, in the case of NUDO. Affiliates do play a role in their respective congresses, but policymaking is by and large the preserve of the executive bodies of parties.

Societal entrenchment The only political party that has an institutionalized relationship to organized labour is the SWAPO Party of Namibia. This relationship pre-dates independence in 1990. Historically, SWAPO has also cemented relationships with the Namibia Council of Churches (NCC).

The Congress of Democrats (CoD) and the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) interact with social movements and human rights organizations such as the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC). SWAPO, too, has had a close relationship with the LAC, more so in the pre-independence period.

None of the other parties have institutionalized relations with the primary civil society agencies, although, they do interact on issues such as free and fair elections and electoral violence with the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), an umbrella church organization in the country.

Internal decision-making As mentioned above, the most influential internal party decision-makers emanate from the executive structures of the respective parties. In the case of the SWAPO Party of Namibia, the two most important structures are the Political Bureau (Politburo) and the Central Committee (CM).

In the case of the National Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO) the National Bureau, which is dominated by the president of the party, is the most significant decision-making body. In the case of the DTA of Namibia, the most important decision-making structures are the DTA Management Committee, the Executive Committee and the Central Committee. The most important decisions that relate to the grounding principles of the Congress of Democrats (CoD) are made by the National Working Committee and the National Executive Committee. In all cases, the annual congresses ratify important policy decisions.

The different party statutes determine the practice for nominating candidates. While there are different operational practices among the parties, the SWAPO Party of Namibia, the Congress of Democrats, the National Unity Democratic Organization, the DTA of Namibia, the All Peoples Party, the United Democratic Front, and the Rally for Democracy and Progress all provide in their statutes for nomination procedures at the different levels: national, regional and local. Nominations should emanate from local and regional branches and committees, but in reality, the executive structures of parties play a formative role in the nomination of candidates. The practice of party lists means that for each of the parties the centre, in the form of the national leadership, is relatively stronger in relationships with the regional and local structures. In the case of SWAPO, for example, the president of the party can nominate up to 16 members onto the party list, notwithstanding the practice of allowing for regional electoral colleges.

All the bigger parties have provisions in their statutes that determine the number of women, and in the case of SWAPO, the number of youth and organized labour representatives. The general guideline in respect of women varies between 30 and 50 per cent. The latter mirrors the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union guidelines on the representation of women in politics.

Intra-party relationships, such as on participation, communication and decision-making, are contingent upon party provisions (written down in their statutes) and the degree to which party structures and leadership have been institutionalized.

In Namibia, the most important avenues for the transmission of information and the communication of decisions remain the executive structures of the different parties. Very few parties have their own party newspapers; the SWAPO Party of Namibia, is a notable exception with *Namibia Today*. Internal party communication remains a challenge for most parties in the country.

Namibian politics are characterized by a high degree of party brand-name loyalty, party identification and by low party volatility. The various Afrobarometer Surveys have all highlighted this basic fact about Namibian politics. Historically and politically, "unity" has always been a primary value in politics; small wonder that most of the parties proclaim themselves to be "national" and integrative.

*Stability
of party ideology/
programmes*

The SWAPO Party of Namibia (SWAPO) is not only over 46 years old, but its name, is synonymous with liberation and national unity. The more recently formed Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) attempts to project the image of a democratic and progressive force in Namibian politics. Notwithstanding the fact that the DTA of Namibia has been painted with a neo-colonial brush, given its role in pre-independence politics, it has not changed its name.

Political programmes are clearly important, but arguably, less so than loyalty to the respective party (brand-name loyalty), leadership and in some cases, issues. Party programmes are crafted in different ways. More recently, the tendency has been to engage outside experts to advise, as in the case of the RDP, or to establish party think tanks, as is the case in SWAPO. In all cases, party programmes need to be endorsed by party congresses, after these have been framed by the executive structures of the parties. There are examples of programmatic work being done by individuals specifically appointed for that purpose, as for example, in the case of SWAPO when the achievements of the 2004 party manifesto were assessed. Also, programmatic development is regularly done by party structures tasked with this responsibility.

The way in which parties communicate with their voters and clientele is contingent on several factors, among them being the parties' resources, the skills of media practitioners, and whether it is an election year. Most parties rely on the electronic media, such as the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), to carry their messages and to report on their meetings. The pluralistic nature of local print media also assists political parties in communicating with their supporters/members and sympathizers. The SWAPO of Namibia is the only political party that regularly produces a weekly party newspaper, *Namibia Today*. All parties rely to a greater or lesser extent on published party brochures, fliers and, during election time, posters. Professional advertising agencies have assisted SWAPO in its campaigns. It is also important to mention that under the NBC Broadcasting Act of 1990, political parties have some access to the national broadcaster to put their messages across during the run-up to elections.

Communication

It is not known how much parties spend on advertising and other forms of communication, but it is rumoured to run into millions in the case of the governing party, SWAPO.

The principal constraints emanate from the lack of qualified party staff and media practitioners, as well as scarce financial resources. In most rural areas, access to the internet and adult illiteracy are additional constraints.

Relationship between party and parliamentary groups The consequence of an electoral system that is based on the party list is that MPs are pre-eminently members of their respective parties. It is important to point out that MPs in the National Assembly are elected on a non-constituency basis – Namibia is their “constituency”.

Party discipline, coupled with the role of party whips, means that individual MPs have almost no room for their personal views and persuasions. Parliament lacks a bi-partisan tradition. Loyalty to the party outweighs almost anything else.

Parties do maintain relations with extra-parliamentary groups such as organized labour and other agencies in civil society. Often the interaction with such actors takes place either within the space provided by the parliamentary committees or outside parliament in appropriate party structures. To all intents and purposes, MPs are not independent.

III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Party democracy is relatively healthy depending on how it is being defined. Inner-party democracy leaves something to be desired, especially since most of the political parties are dominated by their executive leadership. Officially, for example, “democratic centralism” (some call it “guided democracy”) is the approach and ideology that permeates SWAPO.

The available empirical evidence suggests that none of the parties take their voter education duties very seriously. All the bigger parties offer elaborate political programmes, but ideologically, there is not that much difference between, say, the ideological planks of SWAPO, the RDP and the COD.

Parties are important for leadership recruitment, while most of the bigger parties contest elections at the different levels of government: central, regional and local. The SWAPO Party of Namibia, for example, fulfils these main functions: political representation, elite formation and recruitment, policy formation, interest articulation and aggregation, socialization and mobilization and the organization of government.

Constitutionally, Namibia is a multiparty democracy with a dominant party and a weak, fragmented opposition. At the time of writing, the three best organized and institutionalized parties in Namibia are: the SWAPO Party of Namibia, the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) and the DTA of Namibia. To a greater or a lesser extent, though, political parties face resource constraints, are relatively inactive between elections and their relationship to civil society is varied. SWAPO is likely to retain its dominance for the time being and to expand and consolidate its power.

The more important political parties all have relatively strong programmatic foundations, even if these group together closely. All the major parties face leadership transitions as a new generation of younger voters, the so-called “born frees”, enters the political scene. The political economy of Namibia dictates that class will become an ever-more important variable in the equation. Namibia displays a central paradox, that of consolidating its democracy under a dominant party system.

Party loyalty coupled to loyalty to a person (more correctly a “big man”) permeates party life in Namibia. In practically every important party there is a system of patronage that often works against merit and accountability. Generational tensions are on the rise and political parties will have to mobilise ever-more resources to increase their reach spatially and socially. There is also need for more robust monitoring and evaluation of their achievements.

- 1] *Nujoma's third term contest in 1999 produced a challenge in the form of a new party, the Congress of Democrats (CoD) that was a breakaway from SWAPO, but which ultimately drew most of its support from existing opposition voters. SWAPO mobilized effectively with an additional nasty personal attack on CoD leaders. The succession election in 2004 again featured an effective campaign by SWAPO with renewed high turnout and a commanding victory of about three-quarters of the electorate. The real contest took place in the party congress to select SWAPO's candidate.*
- 2] *This has so far been unnecessary, because each candidate has received over 50 per cent plus one vote in the first round.*
- 3] *Afrobarometer data are from IDASA 2006/2009 and Little/Logan 2009 (available on www.afrobarometer.org and www.ippr.org.na [last accessed on 03/09/09]).*
- 4] *In a technical sense, parliament can pass a vote of "no confidence" in any member of cabinet by a simple majority and force their removal from cabinet, under article 39, but the parties outside of parliament can also remove any of their members from parliament. Barring some unforeseen dramatic change, presidentialism will be deeply entrenched long before a more competitive party system emerges to potentially test such technical possibilities.*
- 5] *Some committees have scheduled some hearings and even conducted fact-finding missions and hearings in the regions.*
- 6] *This is currently proposed to change through a constitutional amendment to bring the terms down to five years and harmonise regional and local election cycles as a simplifying and cost-reducing measure. This idea has been in circulation for several years.*

The authors wish to acknowledge, with thanks, the valuable input made by Professor Gerhard Totemeyer on an earlier version of the paper.

REFERENCES

- *Hopwood, Graham (2007): Guide to Namibian Politics. Windhoek: Namibia Institute for Democracy.*
- *IDASA, Institute for Democracy in South Africa and others (ed.) (2006): Summary of Results. Round 3 Afrobarometer Survey in Namibia. Cape Town and others: Institute for Democracy in South Africa and others (available at: <http://www.afrobarometer.org/Summary%20of%20Results/Round%203/nam-R3SOR-23jan07-final.pdf> [last accessed on 03/09/09]).*
- *IDASA, Institute for Democracy in South Africa and others (ed.) (2009): Summary of Results. Round 4 Afrobarometer Survey in Namibia. Cape Town and others: Institute for Democracy in South Africa and others (available at: www.ippr.org.na [last accessed on 03/09/09]).*
- *IPPR, Institute for Public Policy Research (2009): Election Watch. An unlevel playing field? Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research (available at: <http://www.ippr.org.na/Election%20Watch/Election%20watch%20Mar%2009.pdf> [last accessed on 03/09/09]).*
- *MISA, Media Institute of Southern Africa (ed.) (2008): So This is Democracy? State of Media Freedom in Southern Africa 2008. Windhoek: Media Institute of Southern Africa.*
- *National Planning Commission (2009): 2nd Millennium Development Goals Report. Namibia 2008. Windhoek: Government of Namibia Network.*
- *Little, Eric/Logan, Carolyn (2009): Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 108. The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Africa: New Results from Afrobarometer Round 4. A Compendium of Public Opinion Findings from 19 African Countries, 2008. Cape Town and others: Institute for Democracy in South Africa and others (available at: http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo108_21may09_newfinal.pdf [last accessed on 03/09/09]).*
- *Lodge, Tom (ed.) (1999): A Handbook of Namibian Electoral Laws and Regulations 1999. Johannesburg: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa.*

FURTHER READINGS

- *Diescho, Joseph (1996): Government and Opposition in Post-independence Namibia: Perceptions and Performance. St. Augustin/Berlin/Windhoek: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung/Namibia Institute for Democracy.*
- *DuPisani, André/Lindeke, Bill (2009): "Political Party Life in Namibia: Dominant Party with Democratic Consolidation", in: Lawson, Kay (ed.): Political Parties and Democracy, Westport Connecticut: Praeger Publishers (forthcoming and also will be available subsequently at: www.ippr.org.na).*

- *Hopwood, Graham (2008): Strengthening Political Parties. Windhoek: Namibia Institute for Democracy.*
- *LeBeau, Debie/Dima, Edith (2005): Multiparty Democracy and Elections in Namibia. Johannesburg: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa.*
- *Lindeke, William A. (2009): The End of One-Party Dominance in Namibia? Re-spacing Political Parties, State and Society (Paper prepared for delivery at the 3rd European Conference on African Studies, Leipzig, Germany, 5th June 2009 (available at: http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:ze6RqE1pnKgJ:www.uni-leipzig.de/~ecas2009/index2.php%3Foption%3Dcom_docman%26task%3Ddoc_view%26gid%3D423%26Itemid%3D24+The+End+of+One-Party+Dominance+in+Namibia&cd=1&hl=de&ct=clnk&gl=de [last accessed on 03/09/09]).*
- *Tonchi, Victor/Shifotoka, Albertina N. (2005): Parties and Political Development in Namibia. Johannesburg: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa.*