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## The 2014 National Assembly and presidential elections in Namibia



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On 28 November 2014, Namibians voted jointly in presidential and National Assembly elections for the fifth

time since independence. In the weeks leading up to the election, it seemed that SWAPO,<sup>1</sup> which has won every election it has contested, might lose some ground – though no-one questioned their eventual victory. Regardless of SWAPO's exact share, this election was set to bring about changes. The ruling party had implemented a gender quota, guaranteeing an uptick in women's representation. In addition, this would be the first time Namibia used electronic voting machines (EVMs) for a national election, a subject of great controversy this election season. On Election Day, SWAPO defied naysayers by running up their highest margin of victory: the party won 80 percent of the

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<sup>1</sup> This used to be an acronym, but has become the name of the party. The same has happened with SWANU. Other acronyms used in this article: APP – All People's Party, DTA – Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, EFF – Economic Freedom Fighters, EVM – Electronic Voting Machine, NA – National Assembly, NEFF – Namibian Economic Freedom Fighters, NUDO – National Unity Democratic Organisation, RDP – Rally for Democracy and Progress, UDF – United Democratic Front of Namibia, WRP – Workers Revolutionary Party.

vote, while their presidential candidate managed almost 87 percent – an astounding figure for democratic elections.

## 1. Background

Since independence, Namibia has enjoyed an uninterrupted string of free and fair democratic elections. However, its political system is one characterised by one-party dominance: liberation party SWAPO has won more than two-thirds of the vote in every election since 1994. While the ruling party has cemented its support, the state of the opposition has been characterised by a lack of continuity and increasing fragmentation. The last four parliaments had three different official oppositions, and the number of parties participating increased from eight in 1994 to 16 in 2014, with most of the smaller parties garnering negligible levels of support. It seems clear that, as the opposition has been unable to convince SWAPO voters to jump ship, they mostly compete for the same limited pool of opposition voters. Thus, everyone expected SWAPO to once again carry the day. The only question for observers concerned the extent to which the party would dominate. Internal spats as well as a series of negative headlines made the party seem weakened in the run-up to the election (see Section 3). In addition, this was the youngest-ever electorate. Almost half of voters were younger than 35 years, and 20 percent of voters were of the ‘born free’ generation, who had not grown up under apartheid. Perhaps they would have less of an allegiance to SWAPO than older voters, who credit SWAPO for Namibia’s liberation from apartheid.

## 2. Rules

Elections for the National Assembly (NA) and the Presidency always run concurrently in Namibia. For both elections, the nation acts as a single constituency. National Assembly members are elected using a proportional representation system with closed party lists. There is no minimum vote threshold for parliament, and Namibia uses the largest-remainder method of allocating seats. This means that very small parties can acquire a seat: for example, in 2009, SWANU managed to win a parliamentary seat with only 0.6 percent of the vote (Cooper, 2014, p. 121). The President is elected by simple majority.

In 2014, electoral rules changed somewhat as SWAPO both amended the constitution and passed a comprehensive Electoral Act. Civil society criticized the constitutional amendments because they were pushed through within a matter of weeks and lacked public consultation (Mongudhi and Kahiurika, 2014). Meanwhile, the electoral act was only tabled a short while before the election, giving the Electoral Commission little time to prepare for polling. Given SWAPO’s dominance in parliament, however, passage of both was assured and virtually uncontested. The constitutional amendments increased competitive seats in the National Assembly from 72 to 96, while presidential appointments to the NA doubled from four to eight. The largely toothless National Council was enlarged from 26 to 42 seats (New Era, 2014a). Critics alleged the increase was due to SWAPO’s implementation of a gender quota, which pushed some of its male members further down the party list. To

prevent these from losing their seats, parliament was enlarged. Further, the amendments created the position of Vice-President, to be appointed by the President. The administration argued this position was needed for ‘nation building,’ hinting that it could be used to create an ethnic balance at the helm of the state (Gaeb, 2014). For the presidential elections, the constitution now provides for a run-off in the case that no candidate wins outright. Previously there had been no guideline on how to deal with this – admittedly unlikely in this context – scenario.

The Electoral Bill of 2014 finally set out a comprehensive electoral regime to replace what had been a patchwork of many separate provisions. The Bill created the Electoral Court, which will be able to adjudicate challenges more swiftly than the High Court, to which challengers had previously addressed their claims. It also provided a framework for referenda, as well as addressing several smaller issues from registration to election day procedural matters (Ndeunyema, 2014). The most controversial section provides for the use of Electronic Voting Machines. Proponents argued for EVMs on grounds of efficiency: with EVMs voting could be completed on one day, rather than being spread across several, and results announced within 24 h (Haidula, 2014). Given the delays encountered in some recent elections (notably in 2004, when Namibians had to wait five days to hear the results) that would certainly be desirable. At trial runs during local by-elections, the machines performed satisfactorily (Shaanika, 2014).

The second benefit was that these machines would be more difficult to tamper with than paper ballots. This was the greatest point of contention, and many remained sceptical that they were tamper-proof – even members of the ruling party (Haidula, 2014). While the law provides for a ‘paper trail’ that allows voters to confirm their choice was recorded, the machines Namibia purchased do not have this capability. The news that the Minister of Local Government would have the authority to set aside this part of the law for the current election did not sit well with many in the opposition. In the end the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), together with the Workers’ Revolutionary Party (WRP), filed a case in the Electoral Court just a few days before the election, asking for elections to be postponed until February 2015. However, the court dismissed the challenge and the election went ahead (Tjihenua, 2014).

## 3. Campaign

SWAPO made headlines – even internationally – when it announced that it would introduce a 50 percent gender quota for its parliamentary list. Not only are 50 percent of candidates female, but the implementation of a ‘zebra-style’ method of ranking ensures that men and women alternate, so that women would not be pushed to the bottom of the list (O’Riordan, 2014). Also newsworthy was that, for the first time, SWAPO’s presidential candidate would not be from the majority Aawambo ethnic group from which the party draws the majority of its support. SWAPO also made news in rather less flattering ways. The party congress at which the final list was drawn up was marked by deep splits and fierce lobbying. As various factions vied to get their candidates to the top of the list, the

results shocked everyone: several prominent party members and struggle stalwarts, including eight current ministers and seven deputy ministers, were pushed too far down the list to have a realistic chance at a parliamentary seat – even when considering the increased size of the National Assembly (Mongudhi, 2014b). Results were so shocking that the party launched a probe to determine what had happened, and unhappiness was reportedly ‘widespread and deep’ (Mongudhi, 2014c).

The party also had to defend itself from accusations that it had lost touch with ordinary people. First, Geingob drew attention for flying to Brazil on local business people’s dime (Mongudhi, 2014a). In August, a woman who was part of a group protesting for jobs at SWAPO headquarters was shot dead by police (Tjihenua et al., 2014). At an election rally, the secretary-general of SWAPO shouted ‘Omake aafyoona nye’ (clap, you peasants), which allegedly led to attendees throwing away their voter registration cards on the spot (Muraranganda, 2014). Finally, the party repeatedly landed in hot water over its handling of the land issue, as well-connected individuals received property for free or at discounted rates, and a prominent SWAPO activist was suspended after initiating a land grab (Immanuel, 2014; The Namibian, 2014).

It seemed this was an opportune moment for the opposition. In a survey shortly before the elections, Afrobarometer found that 59 percent of Namibians thought there had been inadequate consultations preceding the constitutional amendments – including 55 percent of SWAPO supporters (IPPR, 2014, p. 21). Then again, the same survey indicated very high performance ratings for the current President and SWAPO’s candidate (IPPR, 2014, p. 15). The official opposition at the time, RDP, hoped to expand its share of the vote, having garnered 11.16 percent in the first election they contested in 2009. Their campaign was relatively quiet, however. Arguably the biggest topic in the news concerned internal leadership struggles. A group within the party attempted to effect a change of candidate: they thought the founding President of the party, Hidipo Hamutenya, would make an ineffective candidate and should step aside for younger talents (Ndimbira, 2014). Despite their concerns, he remained the party’s candidate.

Hamutenya’s comparative lack of lustre was amply demonstrated by McHenry Venaani, the presidential candidate of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). In 2003, Venaani had become the youngest ever Member of Parliament in Namibia at age 25 (Hopwood, 2007, p. 280). This year, he injected fresh blood into the campaign with a savvy use of media and the internet. For the first time, Namibia saw campaigning outside of party rallies: Venaani spent several nights in a shack in an informal settlement outside the capital, and rode the municipal buses to engage with voters (Kahurika, 2014). His deft management of photo-ops ensured the DTA a lot of buzz in the run-up to the polls, a vital boost for a party that had suffered a steady decline of its support since independence.

In line with previous elections, parties virtually never discussed specific policies. While the DTA used media stunts to draw attention to Venaani’s charismatic personality, SWAPO continued to emphasise its anti-colonial credentials, as the liberation from South African rule still

resonates deeply with a large share of the population. Fair observers also have to admit that SWAPO’s stewardship of the country has been generally competent, giving the opposition little room for attack. Smaller opposition parties such as the UDF, NUDO, and APP, had modest ambitions as they counted on strongly concentrated and very loyal support – often drawn from the same ethnic groups – to maintain their small number of seats.

Several new parties contested the elections, to bring the National Assembly election to a record of 16 competitors. The only newcomer to garner much attention this campaign was the Namibian Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF), a group modelling itself on the leftist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa. NEFF called for the nationalisation of Namibia’s resources and made homophobia a cornerstone of their campaign, giving social issues an unusually large amount of attention for the Namibian context (Haushona-Kavamba, 2014).

#### 4. Results

Turnout was reasonably high at 72 percent. The figure could likely have been higher as voting was marred by significant delays. Due to the new Electoral Bill, this was the first election in which polling was restricted to a day. However, the implementation was faulty, with reports from all over the country that machines had frozen and systems broken down. Newspapers reported that at some polling stations, voters remained in line until the early hours of the morning (New Era, 2014b). Many voters left before they could vote, frustrated by the delays. Certainly, the total number of voters was affected. Whether this impacted on any party’s eventual results is open to debate. See Table 1.

While the opposition may have hoped that they could make inroads into SWAPO’s dominance, the results rapidly dispelled these dreams. SWAPO took home a record 80 percent of the vote in the National Assembly election, garnering 77 seats in the new parliament. With the addition of the 8 Members appointed by the President, SWAPO’s total will stand at 85 out of 104 seats, an overwhelming domination that is highly unusual for democratic regimes. As before, SWAPO performed especially well in its traditional strongholds: more than 50 percent of their vote came from four out of fourteen regions, all located in the central north. This area is mostly populated by the country’s biggest ethnic grouping; Oshiwambo-speaking people who have long-running ties with SWAPO, the party having grown out of the apartheid-era *Ovamboland People’s Organisation* (Wallace, 2011, p. 250). In addition, inhabitants of the central north suffered heavily from violence meted out by South African forces in the border war with Angola, and are thus especially responsive to SWAPO’s liberation message (Du Pisani and Lindeke, 2009, p. 13).

DTA garnered 4.8 percent of the vote, a marked improvement from the last election, and won five seats. Meanwhile, RDP had to endure a harsh setback to their aspirations. The party only won a third of the votes it had in 2009, and only took home 3.5 percent of the tally. This only gave it three seats in parliament. It appears many RDP voters migrated to the DTA; fittingly the DTA will take over the mantle of the official opposition from the RDP when the next

**Table 1**  
Result of the Namibian National Assembly election, 2014.

Political parties	Votes	Percentage	Seats
SWAPO Party of Namibia	715,026	80.0	77
DTA of Namibia	42,933	4.8	5
Rally of Democracy and Progress (RDP)	31,372	3.5	3
All People's party (APP)	20,431	2.3	2
National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO)	17,942	2.0	2
United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF)	18,945	2.1	2
Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP)	13,328	1.5	2
Republican party of Namibia (RP)	6099	0.7	1
SWANU of Namibia (SWANU)	6354	0.7	1
United People's Movement (UPM)	6353	0.7	1
Christian Democratic Voice party (CDV)	2606	0.3	0
Congress of Democrats (CoD)	3404	0.4	0
Democratic Party of Namibia (DPN)	1131	0.1	0
Monitor Action Group (MAG)	3073	0.3	0
Namibia Economic Freedom Fights (NEFF)	3259	0.4	0
National Democratic Party of Namibia (NDP)	1389	0.2	0

Note: 893,643 votes were cast.

Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia (<http://www.ecn.na>).

Parliament commences. The All Peoples Party (APP), drawing most of its support from the Kavango East and West regions, surprised observers by doubling its votes from the last election, while the WRP positively stunned the political establishment by coming out of nowhere and winning two seats with virtually no campaigning. Smaller parties drawing most of their support from specific groups (such as the mostly-Herero NUDO and the UDF, which relies heavily on Damara people in the West for votes) remained at a relatively constant level of support.<sup>2</sup> Overall, ten parties gained some form of representation, one more than in the previous parliament. Thanks largely to SWAPO's gender quotas, the number of women in the National Assembly will more than double, reaching at least 40 (before the President's appointments) from a previous number of 19 (IPPR, 2013, p. 1). The enlarged chamber will mean that the percentage will not quite double, but the proportion of women will still stand at least at 38 percent, a vast improvement from the past.

In the presidential election SWAPO's candidate, Hage Geingob, won 85.7 percent of the vote, outperforming his party by seven percent. This was partly due to the fact that not all parties submitted a candidate for President, leading many voters to split the vote. However, his success also derives from his popularity: in the Afrobarometer survey leading up to the election, he had an approval rating of 89 percent (IPPR, 2014). Given such a strong showing, there were few votes left for the opposition to pick up. The DTA's Venaani came in second with just below 5 percent. At the bottom of the table, the candidate of newcomers NEFF received a paltry 2514 votes. See Table 2.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that while, for example, NUDO draws much of its support from Hereros, not all Hereros vote for NUDO, but rather support a variety of parties. While some parties have local or ethnic bases, no ethnic group votes as a monolith.

**Table 2**  
Result of the Namibian presidential election, 2014.

Candidate name	Party	Votes	Percentage
Geingob, Hage Gottfried	SWAPO	772,528	86.7%
Venaani, McHenry Mike	DTA	44,271	5.0%
Kanjonokere			
Hamutenya, Hidipo Livius	RDP	30,197	3.4%
Mbai, Asser Ferdinand	NUDO	16,740	1.9%
Mudge, Henry Ferdinand	RP	8676	1.0%
Shixwameni, Ignatius Nkotongongo	APP	7266	0.8%
Maamberua, Usutuajije	SWANU	5028	0.6%
Ulunga, Ulunga Benjamin	CoD	3518	0.4%
Mukwiilongo, Jan Epafras	NEFF	2514	0.3%
Mulinasho			

Note: 890,738 votes were cast.

Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia (<http://www.ecn.na>).

## 5. Outlook

SWAPO's dominance was unbroken despite its internal issues and negative publicity. This does not bode well for the opposition. In addition, the proliferation of small parties continues. Worryingly for the opposition, there is no longer even a clearly defined leader of the opposition. Whilst in 1994, the official opposition still had 20 percent of the vote, now that percentage stands at less than five percent – the lowest figure ever, by far. As the opposition weakens further, and SWAPO increases its vote share despite constitutional meddling, proponents of a robust democratic order will worry that this result sends the wrong signal to the ruling party.

A tiny glimmer of encouragement may spring from the fact that DTA managed to halt its decline and has a competent leader in McHenry Venaani. Optimists might see this as a first step towards the creation of a consolidated political party that can pose a challenge to SWAPO in the long term. Yet, even this modest goal seems very optimistic: while the narrative is one of DTA triumph, the reality is that the party has merely returned to the level of support it had in 2004. Realistically, the only threat to SWAPO's dominance comes from within. The question going forward is whether the internal divisions that became visible before the election will lead to a split. Given the comfortable position the party is in, however, members will think twice before defecting. For the foreseeable future, SWAPO's dominance will remain.

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## The 2015 presidential by-election in Zambia



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### 1. Background

On October 28, 2014, Zambian president Michael Sata died while in London, where he was seeking medical care after months of reports of poor health. Sata is the second Zambian president to die while in office; Levy Mwanawasa suffered a stroke in June 2008 that led to his eventual death on August 19, 2008. The Zambian constitution

stipulates that in the case of a president's death, the Vice President assumes the responsibilities of the President, but only for 90 days, at which time a special election is held for presidential office (Zambia Constitution, 1991; art. 38, § 1–2).

The constitutional procedure for succession was followed in the wake of both presidents' deaths. In 2008, Mwanawasa's vice president, Rupiah Banda, became acting president and an election was held within 90 days (Dionne and Dulani, 2013). Banda won the 2008 by-election with a plurality of votes (van Donge, 2010) and served out the

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