



Political Party Life in Namibia: Dominant Party with Democratic Consolidation*

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Abstract

This paper assesses the established dominant-party system in Namibia since independence. Despite the proliferation of parties and changes in personalities at the top, three features have structured this system: 1) the extended independence honeymoon that benefits and is sustained by the ruling SWAPO Party of Namibia, 2) the relatively effective governance of Namibia by the ruling party, and 3) the policy choices and political behaviours of both the ruling and opposition politicians. The paper was funded in part by the Danish government through Wits University in an as yet unpublished form. This version will soon be published by Praeger Publishers in the USA under Series Editor Kay Lawson.

*"...an emergent literature on African party systems points to low levels of party institutionalization, high levels of electoral volatility, and the revival of dominant parties."*¹

Introduction

Political reform, democracy, and governance are centre stage in Africa at present. African analysts frequently point to the foreign nature of modern party systems compared to the pre-colonial political cultures that partially survive in the traditional arenas especially of rural politics. However, over the past two decades multi-party elections became the clarion call by civil society (not to mention international forces) for the reintroduction of democratic political systems. This reinvigoration of reform peaked just as Namibia gained its independence under provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 435 (1978) and the supervision of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG).² Since achieving independence in March 1990, Namibia has become one of Africa's better performing democracies

Namibia, along with Botswana and South Africa, presents a paradox in terms of political party systems in southern Africa. These countries with around forty competitive elections among them have both the most robust, open democracies in Africa and a sustained one-party dominance.³ SWAPO Party of

* This paper borrows heavily from our previous paper, "Stuck in the Sand: Opposition Political Parties in Namibia" funded by DANIDA published by SAIIA at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in Tim Hughes, ed. *Opposition Politics in SADC*, 2008.

¹ Michael Bratton, Robert Mattes E. Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 256.

² See Cedric Thornberry, *A Nation is Born: The Inside Story of Namibia's Independence*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2005 and Hage Geingob, www.hg.web.na, for recent treatments.

³ Each country embraces and experiences multiparty competition, free and fair elections, and a vibrant civil society and media through repeated elections including presidential succession. Early violence in parts of South Africa gave way to isolated and infrequent incidents among the forty million inhabitants.



Namibia, as it has been called since independence (still shortened to SWAPO), the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa thoroughly dominate the political landscape of their respective countries. These dominant parties in each case have constitution-changing super majorities ranging from two-thirds to three-fourths of the electorate and of the seats in their parliaments. Opposition parties seem marginal, albeit important players in national politics even if not really in the “government in waiting” role. Alternative roles and functions have been adopted or imposed due to these prevailing circumstances.

This paper examines the genesis, nature and performance of political democracy in post-colonial Namibia, through an exploration of recent political history, constitutional provisions, electoral systems, party performance, support bases and party funding. It addresses the Namibian case in order to explain the seeming contradiction of consolidating democracy combined with insignificant opposition. In doing so, the paper will advance both structural and informal explanations that account for the present non-competitive dominant party system and the attendant weakness of political opposition, despite the open and democratic environment that Namibia provides.

Namibia's 1990 Constitution has been widely praised as being among the most liberal in Africa. It is widely respected in the country and has not been subjected to endless tinkering that might reduce its symbolic importance. Among the many admirable elements in the Constitution is the embedding of individual rights in Chapter Three. Included in these rights, that cannot be reduced or diminished by government action, are freedoms of speech, opinion, organisation (political party), and media. These values are essential to the effective functioning and consolidation of democracy in Namibia. The courts have been active in defending these and other principles to make sure that they are not just words on a page.⁴

Over time the public has come to embrace the Constitution and democracy as its own. In the most recent *Afrobarometer* public opinion survey findings from Namibia, 69% of the respondents said that the constitution “expresses the values and hopes of the Namibian people”.⁵ Additionally, 69% of respondents indicated that they were “fairly to very satisfied” with democracy as practised in Namibia, making that country effectively tied for the highest result among African democracies surveyed.⁶

Namibia has now experienced thirteen elections at three different levels of government that include different electoral features: majority-elected executive president, proportional representation (with lowest remainder), party-list at the National Assembly and local levels, and a constituency-based regional government election system, whose thirteen councils then each select two of their members to the National Council. With one exception at the regional and local level in 1998, all of Namibia's election turnouts have been impressive ranging from 34-82% at the local level, 40-81% at the regional (state) level, and 61-85% at the national level. The Constituent Assembly election for independence lasted for seven days and captured 97% of voters!⁷

As with South Africa, the majority received by the successor presidential candidate (Hifikepunye Pohamba, Thabo Mbeki) exceeded that of the founding president (Sam Nujoma, Nelson Mandela). As was the case in Botswana, succession elections (choosing a new leader) require or create the conditions for a higher turnout for making the selection seem right or legitimate and for symbolic purposes compared to continuity elections that re-elect incumbents. The 2004 succession election saw an 85% turnout compared to just 61% in 1999 for Nujoma's third term. However, opposition parties in Namibia have been held to less than thirty percent of the vote in the elections following the United Nations' supervised independence election in 1989. Despite the revival of older parties and the appearance of new ones, the fate of Namibia's opposition parties has not improved and shows uncertain prospects of doing so in the near term (Table 2).

⁴ Sufian Hemed Bukurura, *Essays on Constitutionalism and the Administration of Justice in Namibia 1990-2002*, Windhoek: Out of Africa Publishers, 2002; and Peter van Doepp, “Politics and Judicial Decision Making in Namibia: Separate or Connected Realms.” Windhoek: IPPR, 2007.

⁵ Christiaan Keulder, *Afrobarometer Survey Findings: Summary of Results in Namibia*. Cape Town: IDASA, 2006, 22.

⁶ Michael Bratton, and Wobin Cho, compilers, *Where is Africa Going? Views from Below. A Compendium of Trends in Public Opinion in 12 African Countries, 1999-2006*. Working Paper # 60. Cape Town: IDASA. 2006, 19. <www.afrobarometer.org>

⁷ Debbie LeBeau, and Edith Dima, *Multi-party Democracy and Elections in Namibia*. EISA Research Report, No. 13. Johannesburg: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, 2005: 48. Many SWAPO strongholds in the North Central regions have no opposition candidates running, hence they experience lower voter turnouts in local and regional elections.

To a large extent the explanation for the weakness of the opposition parties is to be found in the history of Namibia's independence struggle, which elevated SWAPO in 1976 to the "sole and authentic" representative of the Namibian people status at the UN and official support from the Organisation of African Unity, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Frontline States of southern Africa. Such external validation and material support significantly increased the legitimacy of SWAPO's cause both inside and outside the country.

The ethnic structure of Namibian society with multiple language groups dominated by 50% Oshiwambo speakers, the "nationalist" leadership of the independence movement, and the evolving cross border access⁸ coincided with these external influences to make SWAPO the leading force in the struggle. The 1989 Constituent Assembly Election confirmed that SWAPO was the dominant political force inside Namibia, although at that time it did not have sufficient majority to unilaterally engage in constitutional reform.

Table 1: Votes received by party in elections, 1989-2004 (%)

Party	1989 CA	1992 RC	1992 LA	1994 PE	1994 NA	1998 LA	1998 RC	1999 PE	1999 NA	2004 PE	2004 NA
ACN	3.5										
CoD								10.6	9.9	7.1	7.2
DTA	28.6	22.1	33.3	23.1	20.5	23.9	15.7	9.6	9.5	5.0	5.1
MAG					0.8				0.7	1.1	0.8
NDMC											0.5
NUDO										4.2	4.2
RP										1.9	2.0
SWANU			1.5		0.5	0.2					0.4
SWANU/ WRP									0.4		
SWAPO	57.3	74.7	58.0	74.5	72.7	60.4	80.4	76.9	76.2	75.1	74.8
UDF	5.7	3.2	5.9		2.7	6.7	3.9	3.0	2.9	3.8	3.7
WRP			0.1		0.2	0.1					

Source: Hunter 2005, 20 and original sources cited there. Parties' full names in order: Action Christian National, Congress of Democrats, Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, Monitor Action Group, Namibia Democratic Movement for Change, National Unity Democratic Organisation, Republican Party, South West Africa National Union, Workers Revolutionary Party, South West Africa Political Organisation now SWAPO Party, United Democratic Front. PE = Presidential, LA = Local Authority, RC = Regional Council, NA = National Assembly, and CA = Constituent Assembly (1989 only).

A discussion of the political system created by the founding Constitution, written by the Constituent Assembly after the 1989 election, and the unfolding Namibian political process, in both formal structural and informal procedural developments since independence, helps us understand both SWAPO dominance and opposition party weakness. To some degree the party system is a captive of the structural features of Namibian politics: the independence experience, state and executive dominance, ethnic balances and traditional values, the electoral system, and a changed global environment. Other factors that influence the relative power distribution among parties include features that are to a degree more open to choice and control by the participants such as electoral strategies, ideology, policy choices, personalities, organisation and leadership. We shall explore these issues in depth below.

The formative role of colonial history

Historically, the German and South African colonial states created the conditions for the emergence of nationalism and political parties of various shapes and ideological persuasions by their radical reconfiguration of political space. This was achieved both by the creation of spatial discontinuities (borders), where none had previously existed, and by the incorporation of formerly discrete communities within a single sovereign state.⁹ This restructuring of political space created contradictions between the

⁸ After 1975 easy cross-border access for the majority Oshiwambo speaking population (estimated to be 50% of the total) facilitated escape from apartheid repression into exile in the newly independent Angola. This exodus solidified the dominance of Oshiwambo forces within SWAPO, and the dominance of SWAPO in the then-called Ovamboland for the past thirty years.

⁹ Tony Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999, 32.

existing socio-cultural and political identifications and new political boundaries, and gave rise to the redefinition of political and cultural communities. The reorganization of space had direct implications for the development of nationalism and political parties in Namibia. For example, the late emergence of formal nationalist parties may be linked to the creation of reserves (homelands), the rigid enforcement of the division between the Police Zone (PZ)¹⁰ and northern parts of the country, and the strict control over labour and personal mobility.

Thus, the contemporary nationalist parties, such as SWAPO Party of Namibia and the South West African National Union (SWANU) were shaped by specific spatial conditions within the colonial state, and these profoundly influenced their respective political planks.¹¹

The contradictions and inconsistencies that manifested themselves in the colonial state, for example in the system of labour control and land settlement policy, spawned the earlier forms of political opposition (resistance). One of the clearest manifestations of the deep tensions underlying the relationship between White settler farmers and the indigenous people was the Bondelswarts rebellion of 1922. The Bondelswarts, a Nama-speaking pastoral community in the South of the country, rebelled against state-imposed grazing, hut and (hunting) dog taxes and their desperate poverty induced by drought and depression.

At this phase of Namibian history, the southern port of Luderitz was the major industrial centre in the country. Besides being a centre of the diamond industry, it had a small but flourishing fishing industry and a harbour. It was in Luderitz that the first branches of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) and the Garveyite Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) were launched. Both of these organizations reflected the distinctive composition and interests of the urban work force. In the case of the ICU, a branch was established in Luderitz in December 1920. The ICU had close connections to the Cape Town-based mother body and chiefly concerned itself with the wages and living conditions of workers in the local fishing industry.

Contract labour, bringing workers from the populous North, and the colonial agricultural and mining economy, too, played a key role in the formation of opposition politics. The system of contract labour was fertile ground for resistance. The South West African Labour Association (SWANLA) and the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) that opened a recruiting station in 1939 near the present Kavango Region, became targets of deep resentment. While genocide¹², drought, and famine helped to lay the foundations of the migrant labour system in Namibia, colonial policies reshaped these ecological responses into a comprehensive system of labour control and exploitation. Under South African rule, the whole basis of power in Ovamboland (north central Namibia) was changed through a system of indirect rule, which linked the kings and the headmen with the colonial state. The occasional use of military force, too, undermined the power and prestige of traditional Ovambo authority structures.

The informal structures of what Robert Gordon¹³ called "brotherhood" provided an essential basis for the launching of the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) in the late 1950s. Ndadi's¹⁴ account of the formation of the OPO among the contract workers of Walvis Bay in the 1950s, for example, clearly shows how informal structures that had been established previously provided an essential basis for the establishment of the branch. In much the same way, Sam Nujoma's organisation of Ovambo workers in the Windhoek contract labourers' compound, before the arrival of the related Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) from Cape Town, was in all likelihood based on the bonds of "brotherhood", i.e. ethnicity.¹⁵

The international context, too, that gave the territory its special status -- a status that was a bone of contention between successive South African governments and the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations (UN) -- also shaped the pattern of opposition politics in the country for a prolonged

¹⁰ The Police Zone (PZ) was a line drawn by the German colonial authorities that included central and southern Namibia around the area they had sub-divided and administered. The more populous north of the country fell outside the PZ.

¹¹ Emmett, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 33.

¹² In 1904 the German colonial authorities launched an extermination campaign against the Herero cattle herding population in the East of the country and the Namas in the South. Over the next three years between two-thirds and three-quarters of these populations were killed or died in concentration camps at the frigid coast. The underlying takeover of the grazing land remains a flash point for Namibian politics.

¹³ 1977.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Emmett, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 270.

period, almost right up to independence in March 1990. Colonial history and politics provided the foundation for post-colonial politics and political formations. Until 2008 all but one significant political party, the Congress of Democrats (CoD), were formed before independence in 1990.

This was true not only for the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO), the precursor of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) the current governing party, but also for the South West African National Union (SWANU) -- formed in 1959 -- the oldest party in the country. With this, we witnessed the rise of nationalist political formations in the late 1950s.

Nationalist political formations: SWANU and OPO/SWAPO

Apart from SWAPO, the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) is the oldest nationalist political formation in the country that is still politically active, although it enjoys no parliamentary representation. Formed in August/September 1959, a few months before SWAPO, SWANU had the backing of the influential Herero Chiefs Council (HCC) through Chief Hosea Kutako. Apart from Kutako, who shaped much of Herero politics until his death in 1970, SWANU provided a home to the leading Herero intelligentsia at the time. Active in SWANU were also Clemens Kapuuo (Herero) and Sam Nujoma, founder of the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO), the antecedent to SWAPO.

Resistance to the forced population removal to a black township, Katutura, on the outskirts of Windhoek in December 1959 marked a turning point in the history of Namibian nationalism.¹⁵ Not only did this resistance provide the first major issue for SWANU and the OPO in their attempts to mobilize support, but it signalled the rise of a new form of politics in the country. SWANU and the OPO/SWAPO became major forces in the urban areas of the county, and for a time the initiative moved from the rural areas and leadership to the towns and the city. The Old Location events also forced some of the most significant nationalist leaders into exile and the members of the more conservative Chief's Council who had served on the SWANU executive withdrew from the organisation.

Perhaps the most serious consequence of the SWANU-Chiefs' Council split, however, was the impact it had on the nationalist coalition as a whole. Not only did the split result in the withdrawal of the Chiefs' Council, but it also increased the distance between SWANU and the OPO/SWAPO.

The relationships of SWANU and SWAPO to foreign governments and their participation in international organizations were further causes of division between SWANU and SWAPO. Essentially, the international affiliations of the two organizations between 1960 and 1966 fall into two distinct phases, an initial phase from 1960 to 1962 when SWANU developed close ties with China, while SWAPO was viewed with sympathy by the West, and a second phase from 1963 when the former Soviet Union gave its backing to SWAPO.

Until the mid-1960s, SWANU had enjoyed at least one advantage over SWAPO in that it was a member of the All-African People's Conference and the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO). In February 1967, however, SWANU was expelled from AAPSO and SWAPO was admitted. The next year, 1968, the Liberation Committee of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) gave sole recognition to SWAPO.¹⁶ Admission to AAPSO and sole recognition by the OAU Liberation Committee considerably strengthened SWAPO's position externally and acted as an incentive to the movement to organize internally.¹⁷

SWAPO's decision to resort to military struggle in 1962, following the 1960 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), further undermined SWANU's appeal and legitimacy as a liberation movement. SWANU, having broken with the Chiefs' Council, its ability to mobilize mass support severely limited and its appeal restricted largely to the urban population and the intellectuals, collectively rendered the organization less effective inside the country. SWANU remained in opposition to South African rule and joined several pro-independence campaigns inside Namibia. However, SWANU was never able to develop into a mass party such as SWAPO. In the 2004 Regional Council elections, SWANU won its first ever seat -- on a Regional Council.¹⁸

¹⁶ This decision could have played a role in the later decision of the UN General Assembly to recognize SWAPO as the sole authentic voice of the Namibian people.

¹⁷ Zedekia Ngavirue, *Political Parties and Interest Groups in South West Africa (Namibia): A Study of a Plural Society* (1972), Basel: Schlettwein Publishing, 1997, 242.

¹⁸ Graham Hopwood, *Guide to Namibian Politics. 2006 edition – revised and updated*. Windhoek: NID, 2006, 64. In the 1992 Local Authority elections, SWANU polled 1.5 percent of the vote, the party's best electoral performance in the 1990s. During the 1999 National Elections, SWANU and the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) entered into an alliance under the platform of SWANU. The alliance contested the elections on a programme of "struggle for the rights of the masses: land rights; control of the natural and national resources; free health, education and housing". *The Torch, Edition 1, November 1999*. SWANU/WRP Socialist Alliance Newsletter. Windhoek: SWANU/WRP.

SWAPO Party of Namibia

As SWANU declined, SWAPO, formed in April 1960 out of the earlier Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) and the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO), prospered and grew. From its inception, SWAPO enjoyed trans-ethnic support and advanced a nationalist agenda bent on securing the independence of the country under international auspices. Thus, SWAPO can legitimately lay claim to the title of "liberation movement". The principal political and socio-economic objectives of SWAPO were already clearly articulated in its very first manifesto of 1961. These were:

*To establish a free, democratic government in South West Africa founded upon the will and participation of all the people of our country and to cooperate to the fullest extent with our brothers and sisters to rid our continent of all forms of foreign domination and to rebuild it according to the desires of our peoples; unification of all people of South West Africa into a cohesive, representative, national political organization, irrespective of race, ethnic origin, religion or creed; reconstruction of the economic, educational and social foundations which will support and maintain the real independence which our people desire for themselves.*¹⁹

The party's first programme said that parliamentarians should be elected by universal franchise; discrimination based on tribe, nationality or colour was to be made a criminal offence. There was to be freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. SWAPO differed from SWANU in two important respects: it called on the UN to help liberate the country and it was more willing to launch an armed struggle. The party's economic policy provided for both publicly and privately-owned enterprises in a mixed economy in which priority would be given to black-owned industries. SWAPO also committed itself to abolishing the contract labour system and providing publicly-funded schools and free health services. On the land issue, SWAPO said "all existing lands with foreign title deed and ownership shall be placed under the government."

In the mid-1970s, breathing the air of socialism, SWAPO radicalized its political programme, when in its new political programme, the party stressed the importance of establishing a classless society by abolishing all forms of exploitation and ensuring that the major means of production were owned by the people.

When SWAPO published its Election Manifesto in July 1989, the socialist rhetoric had all but been removed, with the programme stressing "no wholesale nationalization of the mines, land and other productive sectors is, however, envisaged in the near future" and that "the independent state of Namibia will stand ready to negotiate with both existing companies and new investors in participating in the development of Namibia's resources for mutual benefit."²⁰ SWAPO's post-1990 policy platform does not differ much from the party's original 1961 vision of a free, unified Namibia with a combination of publicly-and privately-owned industries, and its ideology remains one of Afro-nationalism.²¹

Party Structure

The Congress is SWAPO's supreme decision-making body. The Congress sets the party's policy agenda and reviews the development and activities of the party. It elects the Central Committee (CC) and the four top officials of the party. Normally, a Congress is held every five years, and in recent years it has had as many as 600 delegates from all the political regions of the country and from the party's different wings and formations.²²

Swapo has held four ordinary congresses since independence in (1991, 1997, 2002 and 2007) and two extraordinary congresses (in 1998 and 2004). The two extraordinary congresses held to make amendments to the party's Constitution for Nujoma's third term and the other televised in 2004 to select a

¹⁹ André Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia: The Politics of Continuity and Change*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1986, 152.

²⁰ Hopwood, *Guide*, 2006, 64.

²¹ Samuel S. Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma My Life in SWAPO and My Participation in the Liberation Struggle of Namibia*, London: PANAF, 2001, 201

²² The Congress is composed of 83 CC members; 10 delegates from each Regional Executive Committee; three delegates from each of the District Executive Committees, 15 delegates from the Youth League; 15 delegates from the Elders' Council; 20 delegates from the Women's Council; and 15 delegates from each affiliated organization.

successor presidential candidate. The congresses were essential parts of the still unfinished transition from an armed liberation movement to a democratic party.

The 2004 Extraordinary Congress was particularly important in the life of the party, for it was the first time that three contenders openly contested for the position of Presidential candidate. All three, Hifikepunye Lucas Pohamba, the nominee of founding President Sam Nujoma, Hidipo Hamutenya (former Foreign Minister) and Nahas Angula, then Minister of Higher Education, had strong liberation and political credentials. Hamutenya had to contend with the reality that he was sacked by Nujoma as Foreign Minister immediately prior to the extra-ordinary congress. Pohamba subsequently became the party's presidential candidate.²³ Late in November 2007, SWAPO held its ordinary Congress where President Pohamba succeeded Nujoma as Party President, ushering in a post-Nujoma era.

The Political Bureau (Politburo) is "the steering committee of the Central Committee, directing the political and programmatic agenda of the party," responsible for putting into practice all decisions, resolutions and directives of the Congress and Central Committee. The Politburo is made up of 21 members — four officials plus 17 people elected by the Central Committee from its membership.²⁴

Congress of Democrats (CoD) – The Newest Opposition in Parliament

The Congress of Democrats (CoD) was formed on 23 March 1999, almost a decade after independence, shortly after Ben Ulenga, then High Commissioner to the United Kingdom (UK), resigned from SWAPO. Ulenga, soon joined by several other prominent leaders, gave three reasons for his decision: President Nujoma's plan to run for a third term, Namibia's participation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) war in 1998,²⁵ and the neglect by government of former SWAPO PLAN combatants.²⁶

Although SWAPO saw the CoD as a potential electoral threat, and ran a campaign in the party's newspaper *Namibia Today* to discredit the CoD and Ulenga,²⁷ the newly-formed party took sufficient votes from other opposition parties, principally the DTA of Namibia, to win seven seats in the National Assembly with 9.94 percent of the vote in 1999, second only to SWAPO, and in the 2004 Local Authority elections, the CoD managed to get over 30 candidates elected, with its overall level of support remaining at around ten percent of the vote.²⁸

The party increased its support by just over 6,000 votes in the 2004 National Assembly elections, but it did not make inroads into SWAPO's support base, especially in the northern regions. The CoD captured five seats in the National Assembly and became the Official Opposition. The party, with the support of the Republican Party (RP), challenged the counting process in court after claiming there had been a series of irregularities. The court ordered a recount in March 2005, but the process produced a similar result to the first count.

²³ See Graham Hopwood, "The SWAPO Extraordinary Congress- Entering Uncharted Territory," IPPR Opinion No. 15, May 2004, 5. In the first round of voting, Angula fell out. In classical deal-making, all his supporters save one voted for Pohamba in the second round.

²⁴ The Central Committee is the highest decision-making body of the party between congresses. The Central Committee consists of 83 people — the four top office bearers of the party, the secretaries of the three wings, six members appointed by the President, 13 regional coordinators and 57 members elected by Congress.

²⁵ Nujoma was able to engineer a change in the Constitution to exempt himself from the two term limit on the grounds that the first term had been appointed by the Constituent Assembly not elected by the people. The secrecy surrounding the troop commitments to the DRC also reinforced the impression among many that Nujoma was becoming an autocrat.

²⁶ Tapera O. Chirawu, "Political Parties and Democracy in Independent Namibia." In M.A. Mohamed Salih (ed.) *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance*. London: Pluto Press, 2003, 153.

²⁷ The editor of *Namibia Today*, the official voice of SWAPO Party of Namibia launched a vitriolic attack against Ben Ulenga and the CoD. See for example: "Pohamba fires Ben Ulenga", in *Namibia Today*, Vol. 1, No.9, Monday 15-Sunday 21 November 1999; See also "What Uulenga told the enemy", in *Namibia Today*, Vol.1, No. 10, Monday 22-Sunday 28 November 1999, and "Ulenga's folly to be exposed", in *Namibia Today*, Vol.1, No.7, Monday 1-Sunday 7 November 1999.

²⁸ Hopwood, *Guide*, 52.

In the 2004 National Assembly elections, the party lost significant support in Caprivi and performed best in the southern regions of Hardap and Karas. In the same year, the party failed to win a single seat in Regional Council elections -- despite gathering the most votes after SWAPO -- underscoring the diffuse nature of its support, a disadvantage in constituency voting, and the fact that the party does not yet have a national reach. Further infighting amongst two leadership factions in 2007 contributed towards undermining the popular appeal of the CoD even further. An Extraordinary Congress called to challenge the leadership, broke down into irreconcilable, rancorous conflict that was resolved by the High Court. In the meantime, one leader passed away and another broke away to form a new party. Heading toward the next elections in 2009, the CoD looks more vulnerable than ever.

The CoD Policy Manifesto mirrors many of the core values of a social democracy. The three core virtues are equal opportunities, poverty eradication, and social welfare for all citizens. Gender equality is another key element of the party's human rights and social policy. On governance, the party proposes zero tolerance of corruption and good governance at all levels of the State.²⁹

DTA of Namibia

The Democratic Turnhalle Alliance of Namibia (DTA) grew out of the South African-backed Turnhalle Constitutional Conference, a key part of Pretoria's strategy to control Namibia's transition to independence and to neutralize SWAPO's popular appeal. The Turnhalle Constitutional Conference met from September 1975 to October 1977.³⁰ The DTA took its original name -- Democratic Turnhalle Alliance -- from the name of the building where the Constitutional Conference took place. The DTA was spawned by Turnhalle participants who walked out of the conference's constitutional committee in 1977 in protest at the National Party's insistence that some racially discriminatory legislation remain in force.

Since its formation the DTA was essentially a coalition of ethnic parties -- most of which served in the second tier ethnic administrations (homelands) set up by the South African-appointed Administrator-General (AG) in 1980. The four largest of the eleven ethnic groups in Namibia are Oshiwambo speakers at 48.5% of the total population (overwhelmingly SWAPO supporters), Nama/Damara at about 12%, RuKavango at about 10% and Herero at about 8%. Therefore, the DTA has been tarred with an ethnic brush and was widely seen as a stratagem of the colonial power, South Africa. The Chairperson of the party, Johan De Waal, suggests that this remains the major hindrance to the party's effectiveness.³¹

The DTA played the key role in two initiatives aimed at reaching an internal settlement in Namibia without the involvement of the United Nations (UN) and SWAPO. The first initiative foundered after a clash with the South African-appointed Administrator-General (AG), and the second established a transitional administration that lasted until 1989, the year of implementation of the UN Transitional Plan for Namibia.³²

In December 1978 the DTA won an internal election for a 50-member Constituent Assembly with over 82% of the vote. The election, which was boycotted by SWAPO and other internal parties, was widely discredited and did not win international credibility for the DTA. The DTA then participated in a new attempt to seek international acceptance -- the Multi-Party Conference (MPC) of 1983 that culminated in the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU) in 1985. The TGNU, in which the DTA held three cabinet posts, remained in power until it was dissolved in 1989 following the implementation of the UN independence process.³³ At the UN-supervised independence elections in 1989 the DTA consisted of 12 predominantly ethnic parties.

In the late 1980s Herero Paramount Chief and NUDO leader Kuaima Riruako became president. He led the DTA until independence, when Mishake Muyongo -- a former Vice-President of SWAPO -- became Acting President and leader of the opposition in the National Assembly (NA). When it transpired that Muyongo was centrally involved in attempts to secede the Caprivi from the rest of the country in 1998/9, he was replaced by yet another Herero, Katuutire Kaura. Dirk Mudge, the founding White politician, remained DTA chairperson from 1977 until 1995, the year he retired from active politics.

In the 1989 independence elections, the DTA did fairly well. The alliance won in electoral districts in southern, eastern and central areas, but faced a crushing defeat from SWAPO in the more populous north-central Oshiwambo regions. The first regional and local elections in 1992 showed that the DTA

²⁹ CoD's Programme for a Better Namibia, 1999; see also CoD Political Declaration and Principles of the Congress of Democrats, 2000; also Congress of Democrats CoD Constitution, 2001.

³⁰ Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*.

³¹ Interview 2006.

³² Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*.

³³ Hopwood, *Guide*, 56.

(which had consolidated into a single party a year earlier) was not making any inroads into SWAPO's strongholds. The DTA took 27 percent of the vote in the Regional Council elections and 33 percent in the Local Authority elections, with 21 seats. (See Table 1)

By 1994, the National Elections (NA) brought the DTA support down to 20 percent of the NA ballot, while DTA President Muyongo polled only 23 percent support in a showdown with Nujoma for the presidency. Low turnouts (below 50 percent) in the 1998 regional and local elections saw the DTA losing support, down from 33 percent to 24 percent in the local election and from 27 percent to 24 percent in the regional vote. The major electoral collapse came in 1999 -- the year of attempts to secede the Caprivi Region -- when support sank to 9.48 percent and the newly-formed CoD finished marginally ahead in the popular vote. Since then three of the DTA's affiliate parties -- the Democratic Party of Namibia, NUDO and the Republican Party -- have broken away, making future election prospects even more uncertain.

In retrospect one has to recognize that in the 1989 independence elections, the DTA benefited from considerable financial backing from South Africa. Meanwhile, SWAPO had to face accusations about the detainee issue (when hundreds of SWAPO exiles allegedly were jailed in dungeons, tortured, and disappeared) which was then still fresh in the memory of those who suffered at the hands of the liberation movement. Since then, the DTA has had to contend with life in diminishing opposition. In 2000 the DTA entered into a parliamentary coalition with the United Democratic Front (UDF) in a successful attempt to save its Official Opposition status. The party slumped to just five percent of the vote in the 2004 National Assembly elections with only four seats and lost its Official Opposition status to the COD. The DTA won only two seats in the 2004 Regional Council elections.

Smaller Parties and Other Opposition Formations

Several smaller parties and two non-party associations complete the array of opposition forces in Namibia.

Rally for Democracy and Progress. In 2008 several SWAPO leaders led by former Minister Hidipo Hamutenya, among others, finally broke with the ruling party to found a challenger based initially among Kwanyama voters. The party could break up SWAPO's dominance among Oshiwambo voters, but has yet to demonstrate popular following at the polls. Their aspirations are to be the official opposition and a national (rather than tribal) party after the 2009 elections.

All People's Party. This party was formed by one of the defectors from the CoD. It has its early popular base among a group in the Kavango Region. It also has not been tested yet at the polls. Another two new parties are registered in the Caprivi Region and a further one with its base among some of the southern ethnic groups. This recent rise of ethnic or tribal parties has raised concern in some quarters.

Monitor Action Group (MAG). Monitor Action Group (MAG) was formed in 1991 out of the remnants of the former all-white National Party (NP) and Action Christian National (ACN) -- an alliance of NP supporters and German conservatives set up to take part in the 1989 independence elections. Since then, MAG has been represented by its Chairperson, Kosie Pretorius, who was the party's lone member in the National Assembly from 1995 to 2005 when he retired from parliament. In all elections MAG did not gain enough votes to reach the quota for a National Assembly seat, but had a representative through the electoral system that rewards parties with the largest remainders.³⁴

National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO). The National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) left the DTA in late 2003 and subsequently registered as a political party with the Directorate of Elections (DOE). NUDO was originally formed by the Herero Chiefs' Council (HCC) in September 1964, after the former parted company with SWANU over its more radical agenda. Clemens Kapuuu became Paramount Chief of the Herero on the death of Hosea Kutako in 1970. He led NUDO until his assassination in March 1978, after which Chief Kuaima Riruako took over the leadership.

In 1975 the party joined the South African supported Turnhalle constitutional talks and later became a member of the DTA with Kapuuu as the alliance's first president. The party participated in the Multiparty Conference of 1983, which led to the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU) two years later.

The party participated with the DTA in the 1989 independence elections and, were among the DTA's 21 MPs in the first National Assembly. When NUDO broke away from the DTA in late 2003 (on the ground that it always retained its own identity as a party), the party was soon recognized by the Directorate of Elections as a separate party.³⁵

In the Local Authority elections of May 2004 NUDO gained nine seats countrywide in seven different towns, three seats in the 2004 National Assembly elections -- with four percent of the national vote, and

³⁴ Monitor Action Group (MAG), *On Saak. Ons Man*. Windhoek: MAG, 2004.

³⁵ This re-emerged party survived a court challenge by the DTA over who could claim to be the rightful inheritors of the party's name and official status.

two seats in the Regional Council elections of 2004 in predominantly Herero-speaking regions. In 2004, the party came out in favour of national unity and federalism.³⁶ Its major policy emphasis has been to challenge Germany over the 1904-7 Genocide.

Republican Party (RP). The Republican Party (RP) was formed in October 1977 when Dirk Mudge left the National Party. The party became an associate party of the DTA on its formation in November 1977. The party is currently being led by Henk Mudge, son of founder member Dirk Mudge.

In April 2003 former members of the RP met at a congress and decided to re-activate the party. In this process, the RP failed to bring along all of its former members and party officials. The party won seats in seven of the nine local councils in which it contested the 2004 Local Authority elections. In the 2004 National Assembly elections the party gained two percent of the vote and managed to gain one seat for Henk Mudge in parliament.

The Republican Party (RP) calls itself a “principled and Christian” party.³⁷

United Democratic Front (UDF). The United Democratic Front (UDF), like many other political formations in the country, was formed in 1989 in anticipation of independence. The party draws the bulk of its support from Damara voters. Although originally an alliance of six parties, the leading role was played by Justus Garoéb’s Damara Council (DC). In the words of one analyst, “The UDF alliance was a curious hotchpotch of tribal interests, hard line socialists, Caprivian politicians, and former Swapo detainees who had formed the PUM”.³⁸

In the 1989 independence elections the UDF won four seats in the Constituent Assembly (the body that drew up the Constitution). Predictably, the UDF achieved its best results in Damaraland (which was an electoral district in 1989), gaining an absolute majority (52 Percent). Since then it has not managed to extend its power base beyond the Damara community. The UDF entered into a parliamentary coalition with the DTA in 2000 and became part of the Official Opposition, since the two parties had nine seats against the CoD’s seven. The pact came to an end in 2005.

In the 2004 Local Authority elections, the UDF emerged in control of two small towns, and gained a seat for the first time in Windhoek – with 26 councillors in 14 towns – up from 25 in 13 towns in 1998. The party increased its number of seats in the National Assembly to three after the 2004 National Assembly elections and took five seats in the Erongo and Kunene Regional Council elections. The party’s Secretary General was chosen as the Governor of the Kunene Region.

Other opposition formations:

Residents Associations. Residents Associations first became participants in local democracy during the 1992 Local Authority elections with separate groups seeking seats in Mariental, Swakopmund, Windhoek, and Walvis Bay. Only the Swakopmund Residents Association succeeded by winning one seat. In 1992 Residents Associations only scored 1.19 percent of the total number of votes cast. However, in 1998 that share of the vote increased to 8.22 percent, with such associations campaigning successfully in eight towns and taking control of one town council after capturing four seats.

The 2004 Local Authority elections, however, reduced the number of independent candidates to seven in five towns countrywide. To date Residents Associations seem not to have captured the imagination of the voters, while one association faced damaging accusations of inefficiency and corruption. Local elections are still primarily national.

The **Namibian Women’s Manifesto Network (NWMN)** a broad-based women’s coalition of local NGO’s campaigned during the 2004 Regional Council elections with a view towards achieving fifty percent gender representation at that level of the state.³⁹ The election results, however, proved disappointing from a gender perspective, with only seven out of 26 National Council members being women.⁴⁰

In other respects gender empowerment is reasonably successful in Namibia with 42% of local elected officials being women and thirty percent of national office bearers and managers women as well.

³⁶ National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO), *Election Manifesto of the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO)*. Windhoek: NUDO, 2004, 5-6.

³⁷ Republican Party of Namibia (RP) *Stem RP Henk Mudge President*. Windhoek: RP, (n.d.)

³⁸ Hopwood, *Guide*, 15.

³⁹ The Namibian Women’s Manifesto Network, 2004.

⁴⁰ Guide to Parliament, 2005, p. 23; Gretchen Bauer, “Namibia: Losing Ground Without Mandatory Quotas.” In Gretchen Bauer and Hannah E. Britton, eds. *Women in African Parliaments*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006.

These numbers rank Namibia very high in SADC, Africa, and the world.⁴¹ Party leaders and managers also show a relatively high percentage of women with the three largest parties averaging 24-25% of their executive bodies being composed of women.⁴² NWMN also unsuccessfully tried to introduce Namibia's first private bill to Parliament calling for equal gender requirements for candidates of political parties.

The Template of Independence

Several decisive elements of Namibian politics can be attributed to the founding "moment" of Namibia's Republic, a moment when key factors underlying the dynamics of one-party dominance were seemingly locked in so firmly that even today they reinforce the dominance of SWAPO.

One major factor is the "independence honeymoon" that SWAPO maintains as the leading liberation movement. Not only do voters repeatedly recreate the 1989 election at all levels of government, but the emotional and symbolic features of liberation and independence redound to the advantage of SWAPO. Maintaining such a dynamic is clearly to SWAPO's benefit, so a complex, unified nationalist ideology has been created -- including a feature film on the life of the Founding President Sam Nujoma. Indeed, one of the opposition parties has repeatedly challenged the way SWAPO has transformed national days and events into party political celebrations (at taxpayer expense and with massive state media coverage).⁴³

When convenient, SWAPO leaders can and do remind the voters and the nation of the harsh colonial past, the racism and oppression of apartheid, imperialism, land alienation, resource exploitation, and military conquest among others to reinforce and keep alive the 1989 moment. The nationalist anti-colonial movement dominates even local elections, where candidates are chosen or screened by the central party leadership and even removed at will by national leaders.⁴⁴ SWAPO has not needed to resort exclusively or excessively to this strategy due to other successes on which the party can campaign and govern. Nonetheless, they keep the tool sharp and do use it from time to time.

At the same time SWAPO also has emphasized the opposite theme before and after independence. **National reconciliation** has become a major policy of the independence period. Mindful in the early 1990's of the potential for racial and ethnic conflicts to deny the fruits of independence, as had happened in Angola and Mozambique (in contrast to *early* reconciliation success in Zimbabwe), SWAPO leaders led by President Nujoma and Prime Minister Hage Geingob repeatedly called on Namibians to "forgive and forget". This policy also was advocated by the Namibian Council of Churches, arguably the most influential and active component of civil society at independence. Other international partners approved and supported the new policy. President Nujoma also repeated earlier calls from Botswana and Zambia in their independence rhetoric, with a plea for "one Namibia, one nation," which became another iconic slogan in Namibia.

Elements of this sentiment were encapsulated in the Constitution with **entrenched human rights** provisions, protection of property rights, and employment protection for the existing body of public servants (Article 141). The policy has remained a powerful symbolic moderating tool for a post-conflict heterogeneous society.⁴⁵ Together with the commitment to democracy and independence, reconciliation

⁴¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*. New York: United Nations, 2006, 156

⁴² Le Beau and others argue that the Namibian figures are "low" and under-representative, yet Namibia ranks 24th in the world parliamentary list (IPU), third in SADC, and fifth in Africa as far as the percentage of women representatives in parliament. While improvements can and should be made, these are respectable rankings for a young democracy. Le Beau and Dima, *Multi-party*, 82.

⁴³ CoD Parliamentarian Tsudao Gurirab has repeatedly raised this issue in the National Assembly, while the counter question raised by government media is why so few Whites attend such national events, despite the reconciliation policy of the government. *The Namibian, Windhoek*, 22 June 2006, 1.

⁴⁴ Although several parties have done this, the most interesting and exemplary case involved the Local Authority Council of Ongwediva (North Central Oshivambo speaking area), where the elected SWAPO Councillors were removed from office between the election and the swearing-in ceremony, a matter of days! This action was one of many factional conflicts within SWAPO during the extended succession period. An urgent Supreme Court Interdict sought by the dismissed candidates was turned down, reconfirming the absolute dominance of the central party authorities even over the wishes of the voters. The Court reconfirmed that the party "owns" the seats. Party ownership of seats weakens the potential negotiating position of backbenchers, while reinforcing Cabinet dominance.

⁴⁵ SWAPO leaders repeatedly choose not to hold truth and reconciliation hearings in part due to the uneven ability to access South African perpetrators and the blanket amnesty granted by the Administrator General just before the 1989 elections. SWAPO has a long-standing unresolved confrontation with its own former followers, who were

insulates government, SWAPO, and the political leadership from excessive criticism, lest the critiques be seen as opposing these fundamental components of the Namibian independence experience. The alternative was well understood to be violence and chaos similar to that in Angola or South Africa in the early nineties.

Thus SWAPO is able to wrap itself in the flag of patriotism, independence, democracy, reconciliation, mixed economy, and even the policy of international cooperation. SWAPO's anti-colonial nationalist project has packaged these components effectively to insulate the party against criticism. The whole project then comes to incorporate the transition to independence under the terms of the UN Security Council Resolution #435 (UNSCR 435 /UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) process of 1989-90), the constitution/democracy compromises, and the greater independence project. An attack on SWAPO then takes on an appearance of disloyalty to this whole constellation of values.⁴⁶

Other political components of the independence template have also disfavoured opposition forces. The international community, while providing some support to civil society processes and groups, remains mostly concerned with state-building processes during transition processes.⁴⁷ Opposition parties are largely off limits for such support. International support for democratic institutions, practices, and values can be seen as support for the choices of SWAPO at independence. The special status that Namibia achieved in the successful, peaceful transition to independence, and all of the international attention that was imbedded in that process and what followed, primarily benefits the ruling party. The end of the Cold War and the democratic reforms that swept across Africa after 1990 only reinforced the direction already taken by SWAPO (democracy and a mixed economy). The global political environment was warmly embraced by SWAPO and reciprocated in kind with respect and inclusion by the international community.

Namibia's choice at the time of independence to pursue a mixed economy model of development also gained favour, if not resources and international investments. Economic policies adopted by government generally favoured engagement with all sides -- North and South, East and West. Such policies were reciprocated internationally with both private and government partners. This was especially true in dominant fishing and mining industries.

Domestically, the constitutional commitment to private property rights and mixed economy policies neutralized or won over most of the business sector. President Nujoma was particularly popular and accessible to business interests foreign and domestic. This role conformed to the economic development and reconciliation policies adopted by government at independence. Thus a major potential source of support for the opposition was largely neutralized by the openness and attention paid them by government and the lack of better options available through a different government.⁴⁸ Although the apartheid tradition of protectionism for local businesses was relaxed, occasional protection was still used (e.g., against South African Breweries infringing on the domestic market of Namibia Breweries, the largest private employer in Namibia). After nineteen years of independence fairly little change has occurred in the private sector.

The independence template also included cautious and careful policies designed to produce ethnic-based political candidacies and movements that assisted the party in the years to come. As a new, insecure state, the SWAPO government took some tentative but decisive steps towards controlling the potential rivalry from traditional authorities that had often plagued newly independent African states. In part there was an understanding of previous difficulties in Africa, but SWAPO also saw many of the traditional authorities as puppets of the apartheid regime. Many leaders had been appointed by the South African colonial authorities precisely for supporting the separatist policies of apartheid. Most of the forty political parties active in the 1989 elections were apartheid South Africa's attempts to create ethnically-based political units (partly to fragment votes away from SWAPO). Many of the traditional leaders lacked

held in dungeons in Angola. (Colin Leys and John Saul, eds. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword*. London: James Currey, 1995; Sigfried Groth, *Namibia: The Wall of Silence –The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle*. Wupperthal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1995. The 2006 *Afrobarometer* asked the public what it thought about a truth commission in the wake of the discovery of "mass graves" from the independence struggle and an ensuing controversy. The results show a slight majority (53%) in favour with sixty per cent of the urban population supporting the idea. (Keulder 2006, 58) SWAPO leaders remain adamant that these issues not be reopened.

⁴⁶ Joseph Diescho, "Government and Opposition in post-independence Namibia: Perceptions and Performance." In *Building Democracy* Windhoek: NID, 1996.

⁴⁷ Gyimah-Boadi, ed. *Democratic Reform in Africa: The Quality of Progress*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004.

⁴⁸ Trade encouragement, new market access, tax reform, and other economic policies adopted at independence or shortly after, continued the process of courting the economic players that SWAPO had initiated in the few years prior to independence.

legitimacy among their ethnic kin due to perceptions of collaboration and of their having been imposed by the colonial authorities. In 2004 only 42% of Afrobarometer respondents indicated “a lot/great deal” of trust in traditional leaders.⁴⁹

But SWAPO moved tenderly because these were not universal or tested loyalties. SWAPO asserted, but did not immediately challenge, ownership of communal lands by the unitary state. SWAPO moved slowly and cautiously to assert dominance over traditional authorities beyond the initial independence template.⁵⁰ Occasionally, SWAPO assisted or encouraged splits in some traditional communities in order to strengthen their own electoral fortunes or to weaken those of opposition parties.

Finally, the independence template includes, most importantly, the end of violence in the northern part of the country that had been occupied by South African troops for years. The tenth independence anniversary government publication from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) sought to emphasize the peace and stability theme in its title -- *Namibia: A Decade of Peace, Democracy and Prosperity 1990-2000*.⁵¹ This sentiment reflects the general concerns that without peace there would be no development. For voters in the North Central Oshiwambo-speaking areas, the end of terror by South African troops in their villages and homesteads was sufficient to win their voting loyalty forever. Thus far no other party has been able to break the 95% majority for SWAPO among these voters, insuring a national SWAPO electoral majority all by itself.

Independence, peace, a functioning democracy, a mixed economy and reconciliation make for a powerful template of factors that constrain and close political space for opposition parties. We turn next to key structural features of Namibian politics and government that reinforce one-party dominance while weakening the prospects of opposition.

Structural Features Supporting One-party Dominance

Several features of the government conspire against a vibrant opposition. The electoral systems from party list to constituency based, at different governmental levels, alternate the benefits of concentrated or dispersed support and thus do not consistently benefit any of the smaller parties. With limited resources a party might be stronger in one arena than in others. In the end this fragments and weakens opposition effectiveness. In the most powerful elected body, the National Assembly, a largest remainder election system encourages a proliferation of smaller parties.

At independence such a system put a premium on the first choice preferences of voters who had long been denied any choice in their own governance. Such an election system enabled the Constituent Assembly the widest, most credible and legitimate outcome for negotiating a new political dispensation. Its continuation under present circumstances enables several “splinter” parties some hope of success rather than forcing them to join larger coalitions of voters. Consequently, Namibia’s national elections structurally encourage many small parties rather than grand opposition coalitions of those out of power.

Party leaders of these smaller parties are satisfied to be “big fish in a very small pond.” An additional consequence of such a fragmented party system is an under representation of women in the smallest parties in Parliament, holding Namibia just under the 30% female representation threshold for parliaments established by Southern African Development Community (SADC) leaders for 2005. The continuation of this set of electoral systems under present conditions seems to favour SWAPO and disadvantage a more effective opposition.⁵²

At Local Authority level, elections were supposed to convert to a constituency (district) based approach. The first elections in 1992 were held on a party list system to avoid reinforcing the apartheid residential patterns with electoral constituencies. Since the first local elections, time and money to delineate new constituencies as well as the will to do so have been lacking. In 2002 the list system was made permanent with gender quotas made permanent also.⁵³ Local elections continue to be largely

⁴⁹ Bratton, Logan, Cho and Bauer, *Public Opinion*, Table 3.3, 35.

⁵⁰ It took more than ten years to attempt a codification of communal land policy, for example. Traditional authorities were brought into an official, paid advisory role and organisation effectively co-opting them to government. The Traditional Authorities Act of the early nineties attempted to limit leaders to one official political role in traditional or modern settings (e.g., parliament) but not both. Again this limits the potential popular appeal of opposition parties but also counteracts the apartheid experience and culture.

⁵¹ Office of the Prime Minister, *Namibia: A Decade of Peace, Democracy and Prosperity 1990-2000*, Windhoek: OPM, 2000.

⁵² Local Authorities facing increased decentralisation have less popular trust compared to other institutions in Namibia, though voter turnout has been robust by African and other standards with one exception in 1998.

⁵³ Bauer, *Women*.

conducted on the basis of national party identities. A Tocquevillian local pluralism has failed to emerge thus far, although several local ratepayers' associations did contest and win a few seats.

Another feature of the political structure is the issue of party funding. In new democracies such as Namibia the survival of parties and democracy may very well depend on public funding of political parties in part due to the extreme poverty and inequality in the overall society. The ruling party obviously has advantages in raising funds from a larger dues-paying membership base. They also benefit from contributors who might hope to gain favourable access to government contracts and licenses.

In a small economy like Namibia's business tends to be linked to the state more tightly than in larger economies. Thus some business funding sources are not as available to the opposition parties as is common in larger economies. Again widespread consulting and moderate policies do not leave sharp differences between business and government in terms of regulation, taxes or other key policies. Some funding is available from foreign sources within the regulatory regime currently in place, but large donations must be declared from both foreign and domestic sources.

Further funds are available from the public treasury. The provision of public funding followed concerns in the early 1990's about the viability and survival of parties in the infant democracy. Both SWAPO and opposition politicians were concerned about their own survival as an electoral force and negotiated a system that helped existing players on the basis of the shares of the vote in the last national election, which disadvantage, but haven't prevented, new party formations.

Estimates of recent amounts available to the various parties since 2000 range from a few hundred thousand Namibian dollars for the smallest parties, 1-2 million N\$ for larger opposition parties like DTA and CoD, while the ruling SWAPO received 11-14 million Namibian dollars.⁵⁴ The Ministry of Finance adjusted payments according to a formula each year amounting to around 0.2 % of the state budget. Public funding began in 1997 and despite provisions for auditing and public reporting by parties, no legislation or compliance has been forthcoming due to concern for confidentiality.⁵⁵

Within the governmental structure, the most noticeable feature is executive dominance. As is generally true in recent decades, Namibians opted for an executive presidency. This not only strengthens the constitutional position of the office but provides the additional legitimacy of being directly elected by a majority of voters⁵⁶ to increase presidential authority within government. Nujoma combined institutional power with personal power across several layers. He was the founding President, one of the founders and the only President of SWAPO, as well as the leader of the independence process. As such he personally embodied the nation as no other could.⁵⁷ To some degree this elevated position has been institutionalized in the office. Disgruntled groups still march on State House for a personal audience with the president of the day, whether they are unemployed youth, former combatants, or shebeen owners. The president can dominate within SWAPO's system of collective responsibility. Thus far such power has not been overused, which helps to maintain it.

In addition to presidential dominance, the executive dominates the parliament by virtue of the numbers of cabinet members serving simultaneously in parliament.⁵⁸ Since the Cabinet is relatively large (e.g., compared to Botswana or Germany) and deputy ministers are included, there are few backbenchers and opposition members to constitute the parliamentary committees. Opposition members thus are fragmented and weakened in their committee work and easily outvoted by government in full session. Party discipline is ensured by the parties' "ownership" of the seats as opposed to the candidates having rights to them for the duration of their electoral mandate. Executive dominance of parliament has been nearly complete, making "separation of powers" and "checks and balances" effectively meaningless.

For a time the upper chamber, the National Council, under its Chairperson Kandy Nehova, prided itself on being both more non-partisan than the National Assembly and the only effective check on the executive, having sent back several pieces of important legislation for rethinking. Nehova was not returned

⁵⁴ Hunter, Justine, ed. *Spot the Difference Namibia's Political Parties Compared*. Windhoek: Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID) & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2005, 138 and original source cited there.

⁵⁵ Hopwood, *Guide*, 137-9.

⁵⁶ Namibia adopted a French style dual executive of a president and prime minister. The president must be elected by a majority of voters, so a two round system is in place, though not yet needed.

⁵⁷ Diescho, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ Republic of Namibia, *Agenda for Change: Consolidating Parliamentary Democracy in Namibia, A Report to Parliament by a Working Party of the National Assembly and the National Council*, Windhoek: GRN, July 1995, 32; Bukarura, 2002, 80.

to the regional party list due to factional infighting in SWAPO in 2004. The National Council has become nearly a one-party rubber stamp since the 2004 elections. Executive dominance is widely seen as a weakness in Namibia's democratic consolidation. Several remedies are possible without amending the Constitution, for example, reducing the size of Cabinet, including deputy ministers in the parliamentary committees, or even seeing opposition parties winning more seats.

The late former Speaker of the National Assembly, Mosé Tjitendero, remarked that at the beginning of the Republic there was widespread agreement to unify power in the executive. "Institutionally, the consensus around these needs and imperatives gave primacy to the executive -- the president and his government."⁵⁹ Although the SWAPO Politburo and Central Committee were able to curtail Nujoma's perceived ambitions for a fourth term, Parliament has thus far been unable to achieve accountability of the executive. Fortunately, the executive has been restrained for the most part in its exercise of power by generally following a collective decision-making process within the Party and the Cabinet. The consolidation of democracy in Namibia requires a more robust institutionalization of restraint and accountability. A more effective parliament features among other things stronger opposition voices (more numerous or more respected), more effective committee efforts, and improved quality of parliamentary debates.

An additional structural feature biased against opposition parties is Namibia's economic structure. In this Namibia is similar to Botswana and other small economies. Although the existing forty thousand public officials from the prior eleven different "ethnic administrations" were guaranteed a due process in their employment security (Article 141), government continues to be the country's largest employer adding more than forty thousand new people to the public service since 1990. Through control over the parastatals and other appointed positions, the ruling party operates a very effective spoils system of employment opportunities.

Over the past five years or so the reserving "jobs for comrades" issue has been highlighted in speeches and media coverage, especially from the SWAPO Youth League leadership. Competition for jobs has limited private sector opportunities. Consequently, a Party card may not be sufficient to get a job, but it is seen as necessary.

Although a Public Service Commission screens for appropriate employment criteria and practices, a constitutionally mandated Affirmative Action Policy is vigorously promoted, also. Job hopping in government positions is a very common practice as previously exiled or disadvantaged Namibians seek first a pay cheque and then more lucrative opportunities. Opposition activists risk being closed out of such opportunities, if they adopt a prominent position. Officials must relinquish positions to campaign for an opposition party, which again constitutes a livelihood risk. The "culture of silence" has a firm material basis.

The spoils system is not limited to government employment. Firms seeking government contracts through the tender system, or fishing and other government licensing processes, may also be reluctant to be too visible in opposition. The recent emergence of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) opportunities also constitutes an extension of economic influence into the private sector. Not only is the government the country's largest employer, but it is also the largest purchaser of goods and provider of services (bursaries, title deeds, licenses, advertisements, consultancies, etc.), which provides it with multiple opportunities to reward loyal supporters and withhold opportunities from others in the time honoured tradition of incumbency. Businesses, international agencies and governments that wish to remain on government's good side can also be influenced or self restrained. The demise of the DTA can in part be attributed to the reversal of its control over spoils. SWAPO has been very effective, though restrained, at using these and other opportunities, for example manipulating traditional authority recognition, to their electoral benefit in Caprivi and Rehoboth among others.

These manipulations are effective and reinforce the common perception that these powers are available and can be used, restricting public and private space for opposition parties. These perceptions strengthen the culture of silence and the culture of fear that many analysts perceive.⁶⁰ The political culture remains fairly open and tolerant but constrained.

SWAPO is also advantaged by its dominance of the government-owned media. National radio (Namibian Broadcasting Corporation) reaches by far the largest audience with over 80% national coverage. NBC television also dominates the attentive public, especially in urban areas. Only in the print

⁵⁹ Bukurura, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Criticisms of opponents tend to be *ad hominem* and nasty, reminding potential opponents of the unexamined history of dungeons and the dark days of the past. The party apparatus is diverse and large, but it can be assumed to be disciplined from the top. At times though it is unclear whether the Youth League or the SWAPO newspaper, *Namibia Today*, is expressing an independent view or the official view in some of the opinions that are expressed openly. More extreme views often find expression through these party vehicles.

media is there serious competition. Although even the government-owned media is not monolithic, there is clear and demonstrable evidence of biased coverage, especially over the longer period as opposed to the immediate election coverage. Opposition leaders frequently point to this bias but are often unable to effectively use the airtime they are given.

Civil society is also neutralized in part by the structural features of the current political arrangements. In the absence of a mass based civil society presence, there is no independent mobilization of voters. Most large civil society organizations are either affiliated to SWAPO or dominated by them. SWAPO also generally withholds participation by their members in other organizations, which limits their size and importance. In the absence of a strong opposition party other organizations are reluctant to affiliate too closely with any one party lest they alienate potential supporters. This is the case, for example, with the main labour alternatives to the SWAPO affiliated NUNW, who must attempt to maintain a non-party status. The churches, too, fear the wrath of SWAPO challenges should they become too political in opposition, and thus this most important and trusted component of organized society has a muted political presence, especially when compared to its role before independence.

Economic Features Supporting One-Party Dominance

SWAPO also gains advantages over the opposition parties via good economic performance. At independence there was a flood of international goodwill in part due to the United Nations' role and in part to the history of effective diplomacy by SWAPO during exile. Thus far the government of Namibia has been effective in maintaining favourable relations with diverse global partners ranging from Cuba and China to the United States and Europe. Windhoek is home to over forty diplomatic missions and a dozen multilateral agencies – a large number for such a small country. Namibia has received one of the highest *per capita* development assistance levels in Africa during recent years.⁶¹ Namibia also has become a good, enthusiastic partner in dozens of international organizations frequently playing host to meetings and always being timely in paying dues. This international effectiveness helps SWAPO to retain the external legitimacy that it fostered from the liberation struggle.

Economic growth has generally outperformed the SADC region and Africa as a whole since 1990. Namibia's economy has varied between sluggish and steady growth, but it has still seen positive real growth on a *per capita* basis. Namibia should benefit from the accelerated growth from neighbours South Africa and Angola, both of whom are achieving outstanding growth this decade. Continued problems in the fishing industry (biomass depletion and price weakness), in the price of oil, and in the textile industry (the end of the multi-fibre agreement and strong Rand/ US Dollar exchange rate) are largely seen as external factors that are not the government's doing.

The one exception in this rosy picture is employment, where both numbers of unemployed and the public salience of the issue disadvantage the government.⁶² Employment has always been the most challenging problem in Namibia's short term horizon and was chosen as the most important problem by 65% of respondents in the latest *Afrobarometer* survey.⁶³ Namibia outperformed the other twelve countries in the survey in terms of how well the government was perceived in creating jobs with a 43% favourable rating.⁶⁴ Additionally, in the 2006 survey Namibians rated the macroeconomic conditions higher than any of the other eleven countries with 59% rating it fairly good to very good.⁶⁵

The main domestic advantage of SWAPO's performance in government has been the high level of support and effectiveness of public policy in general and especially in contrast to the previous dispensation. The emphasis on education spending and primary health care (the two highest budget votes every year since independence) indicates a broad-based public benefit to SWAPO policies. Indeed, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, among others, ranks Namibia among the top five African countries in a variety of measures (e.g., political freedom, policy effectiveness, corruption limitation). Although the public perceives a lot of corruption, they experience very little in their own lives.

⁶¹ World Bank, *African Development Indicators 2003*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2003, 303; World Bank, *World Development Report 2006*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2006, 299.

⁶² Bratton and Cho, *Where is Africa Going?*; Peya Sheefni, Jessica Humavinda & Robin Sherbourne, "Less than 30,000 jobs in ten years? Employment trends in Namibia since 1991", Institute for Public Policy Research Briefing Paper No. 24. Windhoek: IPPR, 2003.

⁶³ Bratton and Cho, *op. cit.*, 29.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁵ Bratton and Cho, *op. cit.*, 7.

Namibia usually ranks together with the regional neighbours, Botswana and South Africa, as the highest performers, while contrasting with Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe among the worst, thus reinforcing the perception of governance effectiveness. With such consistently high scores on international indexes, it is hard for opposition parties to argue that they could perform better. Public perceptions of government effectiveness and trust are consistently very high while opposition parties have little trust as the following *Afrobarometer* data suggest: Satisfaction with democracy 69% (fairly/very) in 2006, trust in President 80% (somewhat/ a lot), trust in opposition political parties 34% (somewhat/ a lot).⁶⁶

The historical, structural and economic features discussed above can account in large measure for the continued weakness of opposition parties as seen in the results of the 2004 elections (Table 2) despite some discontent within the governing party.

Table 2. Political party seats in the 2004 elections

Party	National Assembly	Regional Council	Local Authority
CoD	5	0	32
DTA	4	2	31
MAG	1	*	*
NDMC	0	0	2
NUDO	3	3	9
RP	1	0	7
SWANU	0	1	*
SWAPO	55	96	168
UDF	3	5	25
Local associations	*	*	7
Total	72	107	281

Source: Le Beau and Dima, 2005: 21; * indicates party did not contest this level.

Features in Namibian Political Culture Supporting One-Party Dominance

Additional factors within the parties themselves and the general political processes at work in Namibia may give a deeper insight into the reasons for opposition weakness. These turn mostly on party loyalty and a political culture that discourages party volatility and the shifting of loyalty and allegiance among ruling party supporters. Also, the notion of a “loyal opposition” and a bipartisan approach towards national development are not deeply rooted.

Namibian political analyst Joseph Diescho argues that the liberation movement also promoted a “culture of silence” and a “culture of fear” that has reinforced a negative attitude toward opposition as disloyalty.⁶⁷ In part this was a continuation of the experience of SWAPO detaining “suspected apartheid spies” among its own ranks. This experience involved hundreds of detainees during the 1970’s and especially the 1980’s. The issue was covered by a South African imposed blanket amnesty in 1990, but families and former detainees keep their concerns alive.⁶⁸ *Afrobarometer* data for Namibia suggest that this remains a strong feature of Namibian politics with 59% of respondents in 2006 saying that people have to be careful what they say about politics “often” or “always,” despite high levels of interest in politics (77 %) and strong satisfaction with existing Namibian democracy (69 %).⁶⁹

The whole nation-building project, which is necessary and successful, has also reinforced the insulation of SWAPO and consolidated a one-party and executive dominant political process alongside the consolidation of democracy process.⁷⁰ SWAPO has co-opted most of the political space leaving the opposition with few options save small, narrow, dead end paths. Opposition parties seize any popular

⁶⁶ Bratton and Cho, op. cit., 9, 19; Keulder, op. cit., 28.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See Leys and Saul, *Namibia’s Liberation*, Groth, *Wall of Silence*, and *The Namibian*, 26 October 2006

⁶⁹ Keulder, *Afrobarometer*, 2006, 23, 8, and 21.

⁷⁰ Henning Melber, ed. *Re-examining liberation in Namibia: POLITICAL CULTURE SINCE INDEPENDENCE*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2003.

issues available, yet this often makes them seem opportunist and inconsistently favouring a hodgepodge of ideas.⁷¹

Another aspect of Namibia's political culture that helps explain the weakness of opposition is the tendency to circulate elites, as opposed to renewing leadership. Many, if not most, of the opposition party leaders have been around for a while. Others have migrated from one opposition party to the next. Electoral alliances among opposition parties on the whole have not been particularly productive. Most of the opposition parties, perhaps largely due to the lack of fiscal resources and poor institutionalization, do not engage in well-focused mobilization and constituency outreach campaigns.⁷² Opposition parties have very thin structures and do precious little voter/civic education. In some cases party list candidates were only chosen after those of SWAPO, perhaps in hopes of attracting some disaffected leaders rather than to have greater time to mobilize party supporters behind known candidates.

The slighting attitude of the media toward smaller parties may also be considered part of the nation's political culture, and a factor in maintaining one-party dominance. Free election time on NBC is allocated on the basis of the showing in the previous election further restricting coverage. However, some parties have missed deadlines for campaign materials to be included, suggesting that parties do not always effectively cultivate the free media that is available.

In the long run-up to the 2009 elections, several new parties have hived off from existing formations [All Peoples Party from CoD, Namibia Democratic Party from DTA, and Rally for Democracy and Progress from SWAPO]. This continues a longstanding practice of elite circulation and party fragmentation. Once again both the ruling party and the opposition have been affected.

The most important potential new party is the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), which is led by breakaway SWAPO leaders and may have an important base among Kwanyama voters, the largest among Oshiwambo groups in the populous North Central region. This creates the possibility of eating into SWAPO's majority in that population group. It is yet to be proven, however. Other parties have derived support from narrow ethnic followings in the Northeast and South. Like earlier party formations (NUDO, RP), these are led by breakaway leaders from existing opposition parties. The opportunities here may be for a possible new grand coalition against SWAPO, a further fragmentation of opposition voters with no impact on SWAPO, or a more competitive party system with SWAPO losing its automatic majority from the North. The 2009 elections will show which of the scenarios and parties have staying power.

What is behind the sudden proliferation of ethnic parties in Namibia? Three factors seem to explain this. First, Namibia's political elites have a long history of relocating to new parties. Most of the splits among leaders this time are based on personality disputes rather than ideology or programmatic differences. These leaders can try to mobilize followers to secure opportunities otherwise not available.

A second reason has to do with the re-emergence of ethnic identities after a long period of colonial destruction (including genocide and cultural obliteration). Political parties are only one manifestation. New museums, cultural festivals, and historical investigations are also on the agendas of many groups. This constitutes a reinvention of tradition.

Perhaps most important of all is the perceived need for elites, ethnic groups, and political parties to negotiate a new relationship with SWAPO and the government due to the perceived, continuing overwhelming dominance of SWAPO. After years of SWAPO domination of politics and government many groups and leaders seem to be seeking a new relationship with the centres of power for recognition as well as development. Political parties constitute one path for such a renegotiation. Threats and bargains create opportunities that also may challenge SWAPO's commitment to democracy, while perhaps opening up the party system to greater competition.

From the historical template presented above, it is clear that ethnicity remains a strong factor in Namibia's political culture. There is a widely held perception amongst the electorate that leaders are there to pursue sectional and personal interests. Alternatively, parties function as pulpits or pressure groups rather than as political parties in the more general understanding of what parties should do in a democracy. Opposition party leaders generally see their roles as containing the executive and providing alternative policies not as a government in waiting.⁷³

The findings of several *Afrobarometer* surveys in Namibia also show that political issues and ideology play a secondary role in the politics of the country. Personalities and party loyalty count for more.

⁷¹ Interviews for this chapter confirm that opposition parties lack a viable alternative to the ruling party.

⁷² Vezera Bob Kandetu, "Democracy in Namibia: Wind of Change or Withering Breeze?" In Padraig O'Malley (ed.) *Southern Africa The People's Voices Perspectives on Democracy*. Cape Town: National Democratic Institute (NDI), 1999, 107; interviews 2006.

⁷³ Hunter, op. cit. 2005, 83.

These findings work against opposition politics, especially if one factors in the low levels of public trust in opposition parties as compared to trust in the President of the country.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *Afrobarometer* Surveys for Namibia, 2003, 2004-5. <www.afrobarometer.org>

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