

# Election Watch X

Produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)

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## SOCIAL MEDIA AND NAMIBIAN ELECTIONS:

### IS NAMIBIAN POLITICS KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES?

In recent years, social media has become an increasingly important part of political campaigning and communication. In fact, in some cases – including the 2008 and 2011 US Presidential campaigns – social media has been credited as the ‘make or break’ factor for political parties and presidential candidates vying for (re) election.

Africa hasn't been left out in feeling the effect of technology in the electoral process. The Innovation Knowledge Foundation reports: “The use of information technology and particularly social and mobile technologies during elections has become prevalent across Africa. Technology has been used to monitor elections, solicit feedback from citizens on issues pertinent to their nation at times of elections and even provide capability to manage crises that occur following election results disputes. Ghana, which is considered Africa's model democracy only very recently conducted its elections and technology played a key role.”<sup>1</sup>

In this regard, IT News Africa reports that “In 2013 a number of election processes took place in key countries in Africa, including Kenya, Mali and Zimbabwe, and affirmed the role that technology – specifically social media and mobile infrastructure – plays in these political processes. Technology has long been positioned to facilitate communication between a government and its citizens, holding the powers that be to account and serving as a channel to engage in debate and discussion. Today, the role of technology in elections has grown and social media channels are being used by political parties and their representatives to engage the electorate.”

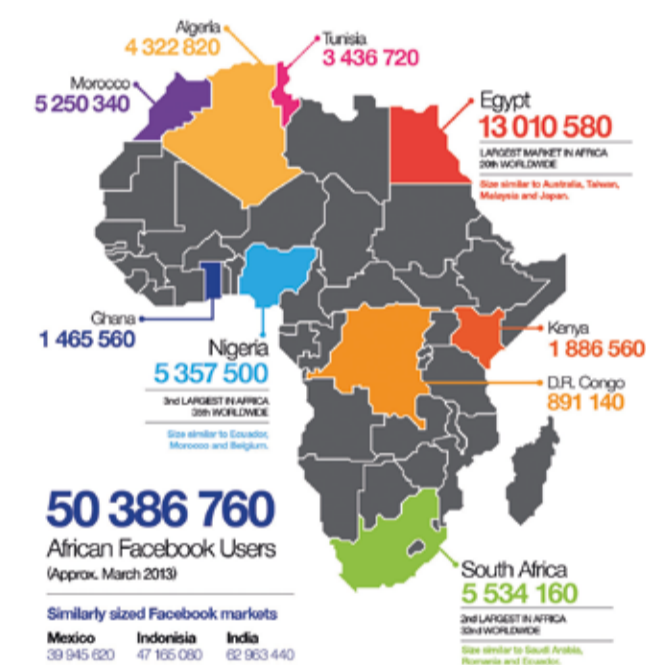
The Innovation Knowledge Foundation goes on to note that “Social Media is actually a real game changer during elections in Africa” particularly because of how instantaneous this platform is, how information can go viral, and the difficulty associated with monitoring the flow of such information. “The case is especially so for Africa given the fact that it is only in recent or upcoming elections that the full extent of the impact of the internet via social media is being felt.”

Namibia, too, is increasingly taking to social media. With a population of 2.1 million people, just over 10 percent of the population is on Facebook, with a large percentage of these being in the youth age group of 18-35 years old. Many Namibian political parties have websites, and have a social media presence on Facebook. Few have a social media presence beyond Facebook. (see article on pg. 3)

Social media is playing a key role across the continent in all phases of the election cycle – from the pre-electoral period (including planning & implementation, training & education,

### African Facebook Users in 2013

An overview of the latest user numbers in the largest Facebook markets across Africa.



Source: <http://www.socialbakers.com>

Infographic designed by @Vantissawesome



voter registration and the electoral campaign period), through to the actual elections (including voting operations and election day and the verification of results), and into the post-electoral period. (See the image below for an overview of the election cycle).<sup>2</sup>

### KEEPING UP WITH THE MILLENNIALS: SOCIAL MEDIA FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In the pre-election period, social media has become incredibly important for the engagement of youth – particularly in terms of political campaign messaging. Given that Africa has a relatively young population, the need to relate to younger audiences through social media shouldn't come as a surprise. Namibia's 2.1 million strong population has a median age of 21 years old; and the provisional voter registration results released by the ECN in mid-March 2014 show that 44 per cent of registered voters are Millennials – that is, young people between the ages of 18 and 32. With such a large youth vote, indeed, political players should be appealing to the audience that could have the greatest say and sway in the election outcome.

This year, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) took greater cognizance of the scope of the youth population, and alongside the National Youth Council (NYC), organised its Stop Waiting Campaign to encourage young people to register.

Having an online presence (e.g. through a website) and/or communicating on social media (such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) provides some insights on how political parties and candidates communicate with their electorate, how they respond to queries and questions and criticism in a public space, and whether they are moving with the times in staying up to speed with changing trends in technology.

Social media can be instantaneous, and with the click of a button, messages communicated in this space enter a vast public domain open not only to a country, but the whole world. This is especially true in the case of Twitter, where even when a post has been deleted by the sender after being sent out/broadcast, it has the potential to go viral.

### CLAIMING A VOICE: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR OPPOSITION PARTIES

Opposition parties in Africa have struggled for decades in media environments that favour incumbents. In Namibia, this has often been a subject of contention, with complaints from

<sup>1</sup> The Innovation Knowledge Foundation, 2014. Technology Transforming Elections in Africa – 17.12.2012. Retrieved from <http://www.thinkinnovation.org/technology-transforming-elections-in-africa/> on 24 March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> International IDEA, 2014. The Electoral Cycle. <http://www.idea.int/elections/eea/images/Electoral-cycle.png>

### ABOUT ELECTION WATCH

Election Watch is a bulletin containing electoral analysis and voter education, that will appear regularly in the run up to the 2014 National Assembly and Presidential Elections. It is produced as a PDF download and as a printed newspaper insert. Election Watch is a project of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). It is produced with the support of the European Union, Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) and *The Namibian* newspaper. The content of Election Watch is the sole responsibility of the IPPR.

Comments and feedback should be sent to the IPPR, PO Box 6566, Windhoek, Namibia. Tel: (061) 240514; fax: (061) 240516; email: [info@ippr.org.na](mailto:info@ippr.org.na). For more on Election Watch check <http://www.electionwatch.org.na>

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# CROSSING THE VIRTUAL RUBICON

Last November Namibia's most popular newspaper, *The Namibian*, reported that the most recent Media Metrics survey indicated it was selling 35,000 copies a day and over 65,000 on Fridays. In the past the newspaper has estimated that each copy of the paper has as many as eight readers – which would mean that 280,000 people (13 percent of the total population) potentially read its Monday to Thursday editions on a daily basis.

Sales have generally been going upwards in recent years, bucking the trend that has seen newspapers in the West shedding jobs and closing down. This is an impressive performance considering both the growth in print media titles in recent years in Namibia and the fact that more and more people are gaining access to the Internet.

The question remains however: when will Namibia cross the virtual Rubicon and have more people using the Internet as a news source on a regular basis rather than the traditional print media? Once that happens we may then see sales flatline or decline while traditional advertising revenues will drop. The current rise in print media sales may well be a last glorious 'Indian summer'. *The Namibian* noted, perhaps ominously, that Media Metrics had found that 23 percent of Namibians now have access to the Internet as compared to 17 percent a year ago. And that is the most significant statistic.

The 2011 Population and Housing Census in Namibia found 9 percent of the population (170,974 people) read newspapers each day while 16 percent (311,539) look at a newspaper on a weekly basis. In comparison 5 percent of the population accessed the Internet on a daily basis (103,698) and 3 percent on a weekly basis (64,303). But the situation is dynamic. Figures on internetworldstats.com (which appear to be drawn from the International Telecommunications Union) indicate that Namibia had 259,899 internet users in mid-2012 or 12 percent of the population.

## RADIO STILL KING

There is still some way to go before the Internet eclipses print formats and seriously impacts on radio and television, but no one can ignore the general trend that internet access is growing faster than print media sales.

The 2011 Census found that 69 percent of the population has access to the radio and 37 percent to television. According to internetworldstats.com, Namibia has 231,340 Facebook users, meaning that about 11 percent of the population is using the social networking platform (and also that more than 90 percent of those with access to the Internet have a Facebook profile). In 2011, *The Guardian* reported that Namibia only had 12,384 Twitter users, and while no doubt this figure has

grown since then, it's clear that the Twitterati still trail Facebookers by some margin. What we do not know is how active those with social networking profiles are.

The implications of growing Internet access are huge for the media industry and also for the political landscape. Companies still heavily dependent on traditional print media formats will have to start developing alternative income streams and thinking about how they can make money from their websites and social networking pages (and no media house globally has really cracked this conundrum). Political parties should take note of these figures when planning their election campaigns. It is clear that while radio and to a lesser extent television remain the key mediums, any serious political party will have to communicate across a number of media platforms in 2014 including the print media and social networking sites.

*\*Adapted from an article first published in Insight Namibia magazine in February 2014.*

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

The Namibian population: 2,113,077

Source: 2011 Census

The number of registered voters: 1,162,366

Source: ECN 2014

Households with Internet access at home: 13%

Source: International Telecommunications Union 2012

The number of Namibians with access to the Internet on a daily or weekly basis: 168,000

Source: 2011 Census

Mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 103

Source: International Telecommunications Union 2012

Number of SIM card connections: 2,200,000

Source: MTC 2014

Number of mobile phone users with potential access to the Internet: 470,000

Source: Ministry of ICT 2012

The number of Namibians with a Facebook profile: 231,340

Source: internetworldstats.com 2014

Number of Namibians with a Twitter page: 12,384

Source: The Guardian 2011

## ELECTION WATCH IS SUPPORTED BY THE

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opposition parties and civil society alike, of Swapo receiving greater media airtime and coverage than the opposition, particularly in the state-owned media.

With this state of affairs, it is important that in addition to advocating for a greater space in media coverage, opposition parties claim a voice of their own in other ways. Social media can serve as one of these mechanisms. At no cost (depending on the level of advertising chosen on the various social media platforms), parties can communicate their standpoints, their manifestos, and the ways in which they will address national challenges through social media. By keeping their websites active and up-to-date, they can also provide this critical information to facilitate voters' decision-making. Using relatively (compared to print and broadcast) low-cost advertising techniques, they can also engage audiences beyond their followers, and may introduce topics that could be taken up by other mainstream media.

By being strategic and innovative in their use of social media (whilst remaining focused on increasing their media coverage in other media), parties can claim a stronger voice in communicating their positions with the electorate.

## SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ELECTION MONITORING

In addition to enhancing communication with youthful audiences, social media has also transformed African elections in terms of election monitoring and crisis management during the election period of the electoral cycle.

The Foundation goes on to describe the birth of Ushahadi following the 2007 Kenyan elections – “a tool for Kenyans to report and map incidents of violence that they saw via SMS, email or the web.”<sup>3</sup> The Ushahadi platform is now being used for various types of crisis-related monitoring, and has been “used to monitor elections in India, Mexico, Lebanon and Afghanistan. It has been deployed in the DR Congo to track unrest, Zambia to monitor medicine stockouts and the Philippines to track the mobile phone companies.”<sup>4</sup>

The use of social media for election monitoring has the power to keep electoral bodies and political parties and their supporters in check, by providing instantaneous communications on happenings across the country – whether through the use of the Ushahadi platform described above, or through

3 [http://ushahidi.com/uploads/docs/Ushahidi\\_1-Page1.pdf](http://ushahidi.com/uploads/docs/Ushahidi_1-Page1.pdf)

4 Ibid.

other social media sites. In addition to this, other technologies such as SMS can be used to convey messages about election results, possible intimidation or violence, or to keep people in the know with election-related updates.

## SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TRANSPARENCY BEYOND ELECTIONS

Beyond the election period, social media can be an important tool for keeping citizens engaged, and holding their elected officials accountable.

In describing this point, the Institute for Security Studies states that, “Social media play a key role in facilitating the interactive relationship between citizens and political representatives. These communication platforms allow citizens to engage with their political leaders at local community, municipal, provincial and national levels. The level of reciprocal communication between representatives of political parties and social media users is still a matter for debate, but despite the contestations, various political entities variably utilise these platforms to interact with and push information to citizens. It should be noted that this interactivity is the

hallmark of social media. Interactivity involves user engagement with information and with other users. These online tools allow people to communicate, collaborate and openly share information, thereby bringing to the fore the power and agency of citizens to make political contributions.”

## THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Of course, social media cannot be used in isolation, as access to these platforms remains limited to a small part of the general population, and needs to be complementary to other means of communication in the electoral process. However, it is clear that social media has a number of powerful uses and applications for all phases in the election cycle. Electoral bodies, election monitors, political parties and presidential candidates could all make use of social media for communicating with the electorate – especially young (eligible) voters. The instantaneous and potentially viral nature of social media serve as both an advantage and a potential risk for those who make use of it, but with sound social media management practices, the benefits of enhanced communication on the electoral process far outweigh these risks.

# ARE NAMIBIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES SOCIAL MEDIA SAVVY?

“Marches, posters, rallies and speeches - it's what voters have come to expect from the political parties in the build-up to the elections. But there is also an entirely different political battlefield. It's a place where the megaphone is replaced by the keyboard, where votes hinge on hashtags, “likes” and retweets. It may not yet be vital to success, but social media is playing an increasingly important role in sending messages to a wider audience.”<sup>1</sup>

As in the rest of Africa, the internet in general, and social media in particular is taking an increasingly stronger hold in Namibia. There are 231,340 active Facebook users in Namibia (about 11 per cent of the country population), and many companies and organisations now have an online presence – with their own websites. News media also publish their stories online, with all the daily and weekly papers having a website and some presence on Facebook and other social media. With greater cellphone penetration, and accessibility to the internet on one's phone – specifically on smart phones – the internet is literally at the fingertips of growing numbers of Namibians.

With this potential gold mine of an active audience, alongside the benefits that an online presence presents for educating and communicating with voters, IPPR took to the internet to assess whether Namibia's political parties are coming to the social media party.

Of the nine parties with seats in Parliament, five have functioning websites, and six have a (obvious) social media presence on Facebook and/or Twitter. (Facebook and Twitter were used to assess social media presence, as these are the most widely used platforms for social media. There are, however, several other media platforms – e.g. Google+, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Flickr, etc - most of which are not being used by Namibia's political parties.)

The table right highlights the website address of these parties, along with the strength of their social media presence – represented by the number of followers, likes, members or friends that they have on these platforms.

Swapo has the strongest web presence, with a website blog that is constantly updated with feeds from party members. The party also has the biggest social media presence, trumping that of the opposition parties. The party's facebook page has close to 5,000 friends, with the Youth Leagues two group pages having over 13,000 members each (there is a dispute over which is the official page).

<sup>1</sup> Legg, Kieren, 2014. Parties turn to social media. Independent Online News, 3 March 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/parties-turn-to-social-media-1.1655158#>. UzhsTMeT4mc on 30 March 2014.

## ONLINE PRESENCE OF NAMIBIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES

PARTY	WEBSITE	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE
Swapo	<a href="http://www.swapoparty.org">www.swapoparty.org</a> <a href="http://www.spyl.com.na">www.spyl.com.na</a>	Facebook: Swapo Namibia (4,997 friends); SYL* (14,539 members) Twitter: @SPYL_Namibia (422 followers) @ SWAPOParty (93 followers)
Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP)	<a href="http://www.rdp.org.na">www.rdp.org.na</a>	Facebook: RDP Namibia (3,996 friends) RDP (478 likes) Twitter: @RDPNamibia (30 followers)
Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA)	<a href="http://www.dtaofnamibia.org.na">www.dtaofnamibia.org.na</a> (inactive)	Facebook: DTA of Namibia (42 likes); DTA Youth League (33 members) Twitter: @dtaofnamibia (11 followers)
United Democratic Front (UDF)	No website	No Facebook or Twitter presence
National Unity Democratic Organisation (Nudo)	<a href="http://www.nudoofnamibia.org">www.nudoofnamibia.org</a>	Facebook: NUDO of Namibia (276 likes) NUDO Youth League (113 likes)
All People's Party (APP)	<a href="http://www.app.org.na">www.app.org.na</a>	No Facebook or Twitter presence
Congress of Democrats (CoD)	No website	Facebook: Congress of Democrats (104 members)
Republican Party (RP)	No website	No Facebook or Twitter presence
Swanu	<a href="http://www.swanu.org.na">www.swanu.org.na</a>	Facebook: Swanu of Namibia (137 likes) Twitter: @SWANU_Namibia (2 followers)

\* There are two apparent Swapo Party Youth League pages on Facebook. The one headed Swapo Youth League appears to have official backing. Sites were reviewed in April 2014

Next in line, in terms of web presence, is the RDP, which also has an up-to-date website, and a relatively strong social media presence, with close to 4,000 friends, and a fan page with almost 500 likes. The party also has a small presence on Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+.

APP, Nudo and Swanu also have websites, but social media presence varies from party to party. The DTA's website is currently inactive. All parties with a Twitter presence, including Swapo, have a relatively limited following on this platform. The RP and the UDF have neither a website nor a discernible social media presence on the two platforms assessed.

How engaged the parties are with their social media followers also differs from one party to the next. Some parties (e.g. Swapo, Swanu and RDP) are constantly engaged with their followers, posting regularly on current events, inviting followers to events, or posing questions to allow for greater

engagement. Swanu is especially good at engaging its followers on current events. Others, however, are happy to merely have a page, with no real interaction. Nudo, for example, has 277 likes on Facebook, but has not posted its own messages on the page since 2009, despite its followers having posted on the page in more recent times.

In all, while some parties have recognised the power of an online presence – including social media – Namibian political players are still a long way from fully making use of social media. Naturally, having an online presence doesn't immediately translate into coming out tops at the polls. However, parties can use this platform strategically to engage their current and potential supporters for the purpose of educating, informing and engaging the general electorate, and for monitoring the elections and spurring dialogue during the period between elections.

## 5 SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT TIPS FOR CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS

From: *Campaigns & Elections, 2014* (<http://www.campaignsandelections.com/campaign-insider/396642/5-social-media-engagement-tips.html>)  
by Aaron Windeknecht / Aug 22 2013

Engaging your supporters in what amounts to a genuine conversation on social media is challenging. Just having a presence on Twitter or Facebook and posting tweets and updates isn't enough in today's digital environment.

Campaigns and candidates need to engage their supporters – and that doesn't mean shouting at them. Here are a few ways to get a positive dialogue going online.

**Images, images, images:** Whether it's Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, they all respond extremely well to the use of images

and graphics in the presentation of information. Instead of posting a bland status update or article from your website try incorporating an image to grab people's attention.

**Be genuine:** One problem that many organizations run into is they forget to be genuine in their messaging. Facebook in particular is a place where advertising is everywhere. If you want to cut through the noise you need to provide something that stands out. Being “real” will help you to distinguish yourself from other pages and the countless ads users are hit with each day.

**Consistency:** Most organizations feel that they need to be on a number of differ-

ent social media platforms but they don't understand that there is a large time commitment that goes with each site. If you really want to try and build a large online following you need to be prepared to spend significant time each and every day posting things that are going to engage your audience.

**Get away from the so-called gimme mentality:** Too many times I've heard people discuss what they can get out of social media. There's a major problem with thinking like that: 90 percent of what you're going to do on your Facebook and Twitter account is going to be for the benefit of your followers. It's only when you've gained their

respect over time by providing them with quality content can you ask them for something.

**Social media is a two-way conversation:** You need to understand that social media is far different than a one-way medium like television and start thinking about how your followers have the ability to directly speak to what you're posting each day. Listen to their questions and concerns and try to modify your content to better serve them.

Aaron Windeknecht is the new media manager for Campaign Headquarters and creator of “The Comical Conservative” Facebook page.

# THE ECN GETS SOCIAL!

The Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) has had a much more pronounced social media presence in preparation for the 2014 National Assembly and Presidential Elections and the 2015 regional and local authority elections, than ever before.

Since it opened its Facebook account in May 2013, the ECN has posted regularly on its page, informing the public of various events at the ECN, posting media releases, highlighting topics sourced from local and international media and policy sites (including the Election-Watch website and social media), and educating Namibians on its role and on the election process. Topics covered have ranged from the introduction and purchase of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) to the outcomes of by-elections that have been conducted since the ECN joined Facebook. The Commission has around 2,000 Likes (followers), and with an enhanced social media strategy, has the potential to increase its following to tens of thousands of followers.

During the general registration of voters from January 15th to March 2nd, the ECN's social media presence was especially active, although it certainly could have done more to keep its website up to date and interactive. The ECN would do well to incorporate other mobile technologies to better engage the public, and inform them of where to access registration

points or voting polls. Through the use of SMS technologies, for example, the ECN could create an app that allows potential voters to easily find a polling station. Nevertheless, the voter registration process was well informed by the Commission's social media presence. This was especially enhanced by the ECN's partnership with the National Youth Council and the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, to motivate young Namibians to register to vote, through the Stop Waiting Campaign initiated by NYC.

The Stop Waiting campaign's page has over 4,500 followers, and especially appealed to young voters aged 18 to 35 using language and images that were clearly more youthful. The campaign also made use of Namibian celebrities to appeal to young audiences, and efforts were complemented by a presence on Twitter (where it has over 90 followers), a road show that targeted rural youth, and the use of SMS for youth engagement and to run competitions.

The ECN would do well to keep voters engaged and informed on the election process by keeping both these pages relevant with continuous updates and information, and to use them as platforms to educate followers – particularly the youth – on the various aspects of the elections.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA?



- 1. Reach:** Social media helps politicians more effectively reach large numbers of voters in a short amount of time. "In the local scene, you cannot just ignore the impact of social media because the number of social media users usually surpass[es] the number or the margin of your victory," said a political activist.
- 2. Engagement:** Unlike television, radio, and direct mailers, social media allows politicians to actively engage with their potential voters.
- 3. Share Ideas & Goals:** Social media allows politicians to share their beliefs, goals, and accomplishments directly with voters, making them feel more directly involved with the campaign.
- 4. Behind-the-Scenes:** Social media allows politicians to give their supporters a behind-the-scenes view of their campaign.
- 5. Turn Digital Followers into Votes:** It is one thing to build a large, digital following. It is another to turn those followers into votes.
- 6. Analytics:** Social media allows political campaigns to more easily track engagement. "We now track every mention of a Senator, House Representative, or Governor," said a party campaigner.
- 7. And So Much More!**

From: CampaignON Technology  
<http://campaignon.com/blog/political-campaigns/social-media-and-political-campaigns-what-are-the-benefits-of-social-media/>



### WHAT IS THE IPPR?

The Institute for Public Policy Research was established in 2001 as a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to deliver, independent, analytical, critical yet constructive research on social, political and economic issues which affect development Namibia. The IPPR was established in the belief that development is best promoted through free and critical debate informed by quality research. The IPPR is independent of government, political parties, business, trade unions and other interest groups and is governed by a board of directors consisting of Monica Koep (chairperson), Bill Lindeke, Graham Hopwood, Ndiitah Nghipondoka-Robiati, Daniel Motinga and Justin Ellis.

Anyone can receive the IPPR's research free of charge by contacting the organisation at 14 Nachtigal Street, Windhoek; PO Box 6566, Windhoek; tel: (061) 240514; fax: (061) 240516; email: [info@ippr.org.na](mailto:info@ippr.org.na). All IPPR research is available at <http://www.ippr.org.na>. Material related to Election Watch is available at <http://www.electionwatch.org.na>