

# Election Watch Namibia



## MEDIA RELEASE: NBC television news coverage of 2014 elections

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As part of its Election Watch project, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) is monitoring the coverage of the impending election (November 28) on NBC television's evening news bulletin throughout November 2014. The focus on the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation arises from Namibia's commitment to the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections which state that there should be "equal opportunity for all political parties to access the state media" (2.1.5). The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance also calls on state parties to "ensure fair and equitable access by contesting parties and candidates to state-controlled media during elections" (Chapter 7, Article 17). Namibia has signed but not yet ratified the African Charter.

### Highlights

Highlights from the results for the week of November 2 to November 8:

- Swapo received most coverage – with 36 percent of all election-related coverage and 54 percent of coverage devoted to political parties
- Swapo's level of coverage was much lower than five years ago when in the equivalent week before the 2009 elections the party had in excess of 80 percent of the NBC's party political coverage on the evening news.
- Together the opposition account for 31 percent of all election-related coverage and 46 percent of coverage devoted to political parties. The opposition coverage was split between eight parties with the DTA achieving the most with 8 percent of total election coverage and 13 percent of political party coverage.
- The Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) and general election news received 33 percent of the total coverage.
- There is confusion about what is a state event and what is a Swapo event e.g the inauguration of the Nkurenkuru District Hospital.
- Overall the NBC devoted 72 minutes to elections coverage – a slight increase on the equivalent week in 2009 when the evening news allocated 66 minutes to elections.



## Table of results

Table 1: NBC television news November 2 to 8: Election coverage

<b>NBC</b>	<b>Minutes</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b>% of total election coverage</b>	<b>% of total party coverage</b>
Swapo	26	11	36	54
DTA	6	3	8	13
RDP	3	2	4	6
Nudo	3	1	4	6
UDF	2	1	3	4
RP	2	1	3	4
NDP	2	1	3	4
CDV	2	1	3	4
Swanu	2	1	3	4
ECN/General	24	11	33	-
Total	72	33		

### **Comment**

The NBC has noticeably reduced its focus on Swapo rallies from 2009 when, in the equivalent week, the broadcaster devoted 82 percent of its party political coverage on the evening television news to the ruling party. The heavy domination of Swapo-related coverage drew criticism from various quarters for not being in keeping with Namibia's (non-binding) commitment to "equal opportunity for all political parties to access the state media" through its support for the SADC Principles and Guidelines.

During the week of November 2 to 8 2014, the NBC dedicated 26 minutes to Swapo as compared to 22 minutes for eight of the 15 opposition contesting the National Assembly elections. The most covered opposition party was the DTA with three items covering six minutes in total. Two of the reports on the opposition parties had negative slants – a piece on the National Democratic Party focussed on a 'rally' in Okuryangava which was "not attended by anyone" and a report on the Christian Voice revealed that the party's list of candidates included at least two people who had not given permission for their names to be put forward. Coverage of Swapo events made the first item on the news three times in the week while the opposition tended to feature mainly in the "Elections Corner" slot in the middle of the news bulletin.

It is important to note that neither "equal opportunity" nor "fair and equitable access" necessarily means "equality" of coverage for all parties. As to how such phrases should be interpreted by state-owned broadcasters remains a matter of debate. In 2009, it was argued that since Swapo was by far the most active political party, it deserved to receive the lion's share of the coverage. While Swapo did organise far more rallies than other parties, it was also clear that NBC was ignoring some opposition events (which were often reported on by the state-owned newspaper *New Era*). As a result, an 80:20 split in coverage between the ruling party and the opposition did seem inequitable.

Overall, it should be said that, at least in week 1 of this monitoring exercise, the NBC has gone a long way towards complying with both the letter and spirit of the SADC Principles and Guidelines and the African Charter (especially when compared to its 2009

approach). The NBC has also gone to some lengths to cover political activities across the country – including events at Sibbinda, Swakopmund, Gobabis, Grootfontein, Kamanjab, Endola, Outapi, Windhoek, and Opuwo.

General information about elections, often featuring the ECN, contributed a third of all coverage. This included important voter education material as well as coverage of some contentious issues such as the right of Namibians to vote abroad.

On a more worrying note, a trend that developed in 2009 re-emerged: that is the holding of government events (at taxpayer expense) which also appear to be unofficial Swapo rallies. On November 8 the news bulletin led with President Hifikepunye Pohamba inaugurating the Nkurenkuru district hospital in full party regalia. Back in 2009, President Pohamba strongly justified the merging of government and Swapo events ahead of an election, telling the *Windhoek Observer* (November 21-27 2009): “There is no law in this country preventing government officials from addressing or attending public meetings whilst they are wearing their political outfits ... Sometimes when our party officials address public meetings as government officials they put on their party attire because they are talking about achievements made by government through the Swapo Party.” Using government events to promote political party campaigns is not illegal although it could be regarded as creating an unlevel playing field ahead of a national election

*Further details from the IPPR on (061) 240514  
For more electoral analysis and commentary see*

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