

PERSPECTIVES ON PARLIAMENT

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ELECTIONS AND GENDER

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Since the 2014 National Assembly elections, following Swapo's extraordinary congress in which it adopted and implemented a 'zebra style' party list, Namibia has featured among the top countries in the world for its impressive rate of women's representation in the National Assembly. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Namibia currently ranks 7th in the world, and 2nd in Africa in this regard (specific to the lower house of parliament, i.e. the National Assembly)¹.

The (equal) representation of women in parliament is important for a number of reasons. For starters, women make up 51% of Namibia's population and of the world's population, and so from a representative perspective, it is critical that the voices of women are present in decision-making at all levels. In addition to this, research has shown that "Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and a more sustainable future."²

¹ Inter Parliamentary Union, 2019. Women in National Parliaments. February 2019

² Pepera, S. 2018. Why women in politics? <https://womendeliver.org/2018/why-women-in-politics/>

Following the 2019 National Assembly election, we take a brief look at how women's representation in parliament has fared, and what it means for the composition of the 7th National Assembly (2020-2025).

As illustrated in the table below, although it was the Swapo party's 50/50 zebra list that raised women's representation in parliament in 2014, the large fall in support for the Swapo party in the National Assembly election (from 80% in 2014 to 65% in 2019) did not significantly impact the percentage of women going to parliament in 2020. This is primarily thanks to the leading opposition party – the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) – having almost 44% women MPs taking up the 16 seats they won in the National Assembly election. Only three of the 10 opposition parties (PDM, Nudo and LPM), have women going to parliament in 2020. However in the majority of cases – as in most elections – the top positions on party lists are dominated by men.

Compared to 2014, there was a decline in the number of women by 1 seat, based on the party lists submitted to the ECN. In 2014, 42 women were listed (as voting members) on the parliamentary list for the 6th (2015-2020) National Assembly, and in 2019, 41 women will be taking their seats as vot-



ing members in the 2020-2025 National Assembly. The percentage of women may be subject to change, depending on the genders of the 8 non-voting members that the president nominates into the National Assembly. In 2014, his 8 nominees included 2 women and 6 men.

PARTY	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL NA SEATS
All People's Party (APP)	2	0	2
Christian Democratic Voice Party (CDV)	1	0	1
Landless People's Movement (LPM)	3	1	4
Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF)	2	0	2
National Unity Democratic Organisation of Namibia (NUDO)	1	1	2
Popular Democratic Movement (PDM)	9	7	16
Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP)	1	0	1
Republican Party of Namibia (RP)	2	0	2
SWANU	1	0	1
SWAPO	31	32	63
United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF)	2	0	2
TOTAL	55	41	96
% GENDER REPRESENTATION	57% male	43% female	

Beyond the Numbers

While considering the numbers above, it is important to understand why the equal representation of women is so important. The National Democratic Institute states that, more so than men, “women tend to work across party lines, be highly responsive to constituent concerns, help secure lasting peace, encourage citizen confidence in democracy through their own participation, and prioritize health, education, and other key development indicators.”³ Devlin and Elgie also argue that although the effect of the increased women in parliament on policy output is not particularly clear, it is certain that stronger women’s representation results in a stronger focus on grassroots representation; improves parliaments’ ‘social climate’; positively impacts the political agenda; and “guarantees the continued presence and normalisation (in that male MPs also consider them issues worthy of parliament’s consideration) of women’s issues on the agenda”.⁴

³ Pepera, S. 2018

⁴ Devlin, C., & Elgie, R. 2008. The Effect of Increased Women’s Representation in Parliament: The Case of Rwanda. *Parliamentary Affairs* Vol. 61 No. 2, 2008, 237–254

It is important to understand that women are not a monolithic group, and that they represent a myriad of unique perspectives based on their diverse backgrounds and experiences. As such, in addition to the need for more equal representation of women in parliament, there is a sustained need for diversity and inclusion on the whole.

Women’s engagement is crucial—and it is important to recognize that women are not a homogeneous group. Depending on whether women are young or older, educated or uneducated, live in rural or urban areas, they have very different life experiences that lead to different priorities and needs. Moreover, not every woman elected to parliament or another legislative body will place women’s issues or rights at the forefront of her own agenda. Clearly, women’s representation is not the only factor, but it is a critical factor for the development of inclusive, responsive, and transparent democracies.

National Democratic Institute

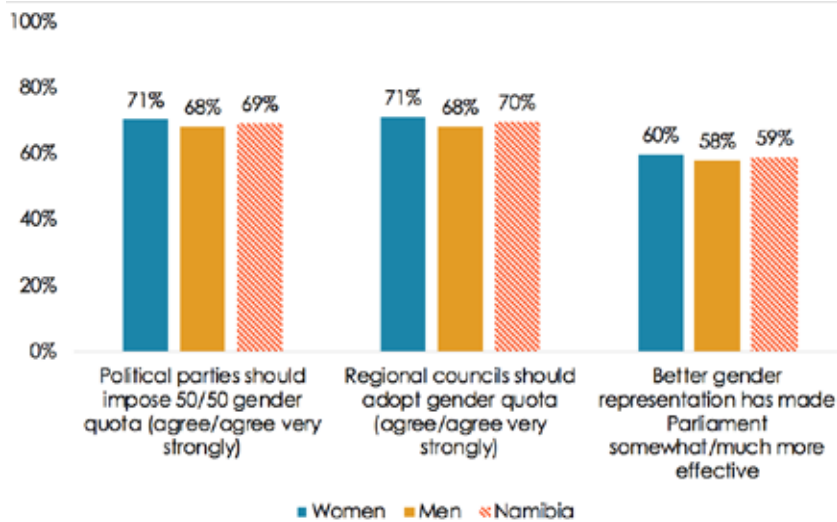
It is promising that in Namibia, there is widespread support for women’s representation and gender equality in parliament. In fact, the majority of Namibians believe that the increased representation of women in parliament has made parliament more effective. In the countrywide Afrobarometer survey conducted in November 2017⁵, findings show that “Namibians want more of this. They believe that not only should gender quotas be applied more broadly in both the National Assembly and in regional councils to bring about greater gender equality, but they also feel that the performance of the National Assembly has improved in recent years due to the increased number of women in this house.”⁶ According to the survey:

- More than two-thirds (68%) of Namibians say that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office;
- More than two-thirds (69%) of Namibians say that all political parties should be required to adopt a gender quota to ensure 50/50 representation of men and women in the National Assembly. A similarly strong majority (70%) support the adoption of a gender quota for regional council elections; and
- A majority (59%) of Namibians say that increasing the number of women in the National Assembly has made Parliament “somewhat more” or “much more” effective.

⁵ Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples. For Round 7 of the survey, the Afrobarometer team in Namibia interviewed 1,200 adult Namibians in November 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Surveys have been conducted in Namibia in 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2017.

⁶ Shejvali, N. 2018. Though a leader in gender representation, Namibia still has work to ensure full equality. Afrobarometer, Dispatch No. 224, 24 July 2018. <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad224-though-leader-gender-representation-namibia-still-has-work-ensure-full-equality>

Support for gender quotas | by gender | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked:

I would like us now to discuss issues related to women's participation in Parliament. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: All political parties should be mandated to adopt a gender quota, to ensure a 50/50 representation of men and women in the National Assembly.

Statement 2: Political parties should be able to decide on their own party lists without a gender quota being imposed.

(% who "agree" or "agree very")

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: A gender quota system should be adopted for regional council elections to ensure that more women are represented in regional government.

Statement 2: The way in which regional council elections are run should not be changed, even if this results in the underrepresentation of women in regional government.

The representation of women in the National Assembly has been increasing in Namibia over the past few years. Do you think that having better gender representation in Parliament has made Parliament more effective, less effective, or not made any difference?

The last finding regarding women MPs contribution to making parliament more effective, was met with skepticism by some. Indeed, it is important that women's representation in politics be examined from a multidimensional approach, as a number of factors affect how women thrive in this role. The European Parliamentary Research Service notes that "It is open to debate how much the presence of women in governments or parliaments promotes women's agendas and interests in political environments with limited freedom, such as one-party or dominant-party systems. For example, two of the three countries in the world whose parliaments have more than 50 % of female members (Cuba and Rwanda) do not score very well on political freedom. It is therefore important to look beyond the numbers, at issues of substantive representation: how much do political representatives, both women and men, speak out in favour of women's interests?"⁷ In the Namibian context, the handling of the debate on the provision of sanitary towels for school girls is an important example of how female MPs from the dominant party might initially approach a gendered issue⁸. (In this regard, it was reported that women MPs were 'too shy' to discuss the topic of menstruation in parliament). It is also an example that highlights the importance of the voices of both men (in this case, PDM's McHenry Venaani) and women from both sides of the aisle in addressing important topics. It is important to note that the impact of gender on political contributions applies to issues beyond those seen as 'women's' issues.

Finally, in looking beyond the numbers to ensure positive impacts, it is important to note that "more efforts are needed to bring more, and particularly young, women into political parties, to train women leaders, and boost women's skills to participate actively in elections as candidates and voters."⁹ IPPR continues to maintain that training for all MPs (i.e. including male MPs) is much needed, alongside general training on issues such as gender mainstreaming, gender responsive budgeting, and so forth.

⁷ Apap, J., Claros, E., & Zamfir, I. 2019. Women in politics: A global perspective. European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2019. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635543/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)635543_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635543/EPRS_BRI(2019)635543_EN.pdf)

⁸ NAMPA. 2016. Women MPs 'too shy' to talk about pads. Talking about menstruation is taboo. Namibian Sun. 7 October 2016. <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/women-mps-too-shy-to-talk-about-pads>

⁹ Ibid.

Gender Representation in Local and National Government Leadership

Article 23(3)

Constitution of the Republic of Namibia

In the enactment of legislation and the application of any policies and practices contemplated by Sub-Article (2) hereof, it shall be permissible to have regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation.

Namibia has made a number of commitments to achieving gender parity at all levels of leadership, through its own national policies and by being a signatory to a number of regional and international instruments on gender. The 2010 National Gender Policy, for example, commits to “increase women’s participation at all levels of decision-making, and provide support for women in governance and decision-making positions.” The National Gender Plan of Action calls for “capacity building, skills development, mentorship and confidence building for women in parliament and other areas of public sector; as well as for the representation of women in all spheres of public life.” And the SADC Gender Protocol on Gender and Development, which Namibia has ratified, calls governments to ensure that “50% of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, the cabinet, parliament, judiciary, all tribunals and commissions, including human rights bodies, civil society, traditional structures, trade unions, political parties and the media are held by women by 2015.”

With regards to the protocol, Namibia, and all other signatories, are yet to meet the overall target, which had initially been set for 2015. That said, Namibia has made impressive efforts since the 2014 election to increase the number of women in the National Assembly. As mentioned above, this is mainly due to the Swapo party’s 50/50 ‘zebra-style’ party list. At the Local Authority level, the legislation on quotas securing minimum representation of women ensures that these councils have about 42% women representation at the very least. The poor representation of women in the Regional Council elections, and subsequently in the Upper House of Parliament (i.e. the National Council), diminishes the otherwise impressive gains that have been made, and brings down the overall percentage of women across both Houses of Parliament¹⁰. To this end, Namibia’s political parties should commit themselves more determinedly to supporting more female candidates for the Regional Council elections.¹¹

Importantly, when it comes to more equal gender representation at all levels – at the Cabinet level, for example – political will is key. Cabinet is made up of only 17% of women. And although almost 60% of Deputy Minister positions are occupied by women, during the Cabinet reshuffle in February 2018, following the resignation of the Minister of Health in 2018 (note this Ministry has a female Deputy Minister), and following the resignation of the Ministers of Justice and of Fisheries in November 2019 on account of the serious allegations in the ‘Fishrot scandal’, not once were female MPs considered to take up these positions.

Come 2020, it is hoped that greater consideration will be given to the women in Parliament – not only because of the commitments made by Namibia at the national, regional and international level, but also because there are fully capable women in parliament. Additionally, political will for gender equality will be evidenced by the gender make-up of the eight people that the President nominates to take on the non-voting parliamentary seats. Ideally, these nominations will be made up of a diverse group of people with the technical ability to lead Ministries and to ensure positive change.

Women in Positions of Leadership in Namibia’s Public Sector¹²

Office	Total Members	# of Women	% of women
Cabinet Ministers (includes President, Vice President, all Ministers, Attorney General and Secretary to Cabinet)	30	5	16.7%
Ministers (includes the Prime Minister)	26	5	20%
Deputy Ministers	27	16	59%
Permanent Secretaries ¹²			27%
National Assembly MPs (voting members following 2019 election. The president is yet to nominate 8 non-voting members to the National Assembly)	96	41	43%
National Council MPs	42	11	26%

¹⁰ Shejvali, N. 2015. A Thorn in The Flesh for Gender equality: How the gender gap in Namibia’s Regional Council elections undermines the Country’s otherwise impressive gender equity gains at other levels of governance. Institute for Public Policy Research, December 2015. https://ippr.org.na/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Briefing_Gender_Equality_web.pdf

¹¹ While political parties can sponsor people running in Regional Council elections, independent candidates are also eligible for election, if they are supported by at least 150 voters in their constituency. Because of this, the political will of the public at large also plays an important role when it comes to supporting women political candidates. For more information, see https://www.lac.org.na/projects/grap/Pdf/Gov7_Elections_in_Namibia.pdf

¹² Note: Source documents did not provide total numbers, only percentages.

Regional Councillors	121	19	16%
Regional Governors	14	4	29%
Local Authority Councillors	371	179	48%
Mayors	57	18	32%
Deputy Mayors	57	24	42%
Local Authority CEOs	57	7	12.3%

Sources: Electoral Commission of Namibia (2019), MICT (2018) (for Cabinet, Minister and Dep. Minister figures), Parliament Website (2018) (for NA and NC MP figures), LAC (2017), SADC Gender Protocol Barometer (2016).

SNAPSHOT: The Global State of Women in Parliament

UN Women provides the following overview on women in parliaments around the world¹³. Additional notes on Namibia are added as necessary.

- As of February 2019, only 24.3 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women. This represents a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995.
- As of June 2019, 11 women are serving as Head of State and 12 are serving as Head of Government. With Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila as our country's first female Prime Minister since 2015, Namibia is one of the 12 states with a woman leading government.
- Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide, where women have won 61.3 percent of seats in the lower house. Only 3 countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda with 61.3 per cent, Cuba with 53.2 percent and Bolivia with 53.1 per cent; but a greater number of countries have reached 30 per cent or more. In Africa (and the world), Namibia features among the top countries with respect to the percentage of women in parliament. According to the IPU, Namibia ranks 7th in the world, and 2nd in Africa in this regard (specific to the lower House of parliament, i.e. National Assembly)¹⁴.
- Globally, there are 27 States in which women account for less than 10 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of February 2019, including 3 chambers with no women at all.
- Wide variations remain in the average percentages of women parliamentarians in each region. As of February 2019, these were (single, lower and upper houses combined): Nordic countries, 42.5 per cent; Americas, 30.6 per cent; Europe including Nordic countries, 28.6 per cent; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 27.2 per cent; sub-Saharan Africa, 23.9 per cent; Asia, 19.8 per cent; Arab States, 19 per cent; and the Pacific, 16.3 per cent.

Source: UN Women

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

¹³ UN Women, 2019. Facts and Figures: Leadership and political participation. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

¹⁴ Inter Parliamentary Union, 2019. Women in National Parliaments. February 2019

Political Party Commitments on Gender

In the run-up to the 2019 National Assembly election, various political parties issued their manifestos (albeit belatedly) to outline their party platforms on a range of issues. Party manifestos are important because they “provide a compendium of valid party positions; establish supremacy over all other policy positions that may be attributed to the party and thereby streamline the party’s campaign; and are a useful campaign tool to directly inform voters.”¹⁵ They are also important because they provide voters (and the public at large) an understanding of how political parties would approach key issues once elected into power, irrespective of the number of seats they gain in the National Assembly. This is valuable for Namibians who may want to advocate for certain issues through Members of Parliament, in a way that aligns with what the parties of those MPs already stand for.

The table below provides a snapshot of the gender-related promises made in the 2019 election manifestos of the parties that have won seats in the 7th National Assembly (2020-2025). An indication of the percentage of women on their party lists is also provided, as a means of gauging whether these parties are walking the talk when it comes to gender equality within the party.

PARTY	% women on party list	# women going to parliament	Gender promises in manifesto
APP	46% on entire list 30% in top 10 positions	0 out of 2 seats	Under its section on Safety and Security, the APP notes that “ Women, men, girls and boys often have different safety, security and justice perceptions, experiences and needs that require targeted responses. For example, insecurity and injustice contribute to gender based discrimination and social exclusion as a result of women’s inadequate property rights, unequal access to assets, and discriminatory social norms and power structures.” To this end, the party promises reforms to ensure that both the structure of and the benefits derived from the country’s security institutions are representative and without discrimination. Elsewhere in its manifesto, the party also highlights the establishment of cooperatives to take an active role in value addition of Namibian resources, of which women’s trusts (amongst others) should have ownership. The party also states that it will “Promote gender equality and ethnic diversity in government and SOEs.” The APP is the only party that provides a focused look at the LGBT community, stating that, “The APP’s position is to champion the cause for gender equality, the rights of people with disabilities and the LGBTIQ community and supporting the LGBTIQ community to realize their constitutional and human rights.”
CDV	42% on entire list 40% in top 10 positions	0 out of 1 seat	Party manifesto not accessible/public.
LPM	35% on entire list 50% in top 10 positions	1 out of 4 seats	The LPM manifesto gives special credence to women in its bid for ‘poverty, land and agrarian reform’, with the party stating that an “ LPM led government will undertake deliberate programmes targeting women to empower and prioritize them for land redistribution. Gender equity in land reform is essential.” The party’s manifesto also touches strongly on GBV, noting the importance of education in dealing with GBV. “GBV is deeply rooted in a gender unequal society and LPM shall address the problem at its root. LPM will roll out and implement programmes, which focus on education around gender equality in schools, vocational training centers, and universities. LPM will ensure that GBV education permeates the curriculum at early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.” Additional interventions on GBV include specialized police training on GBV crimes, improved counseling services at GBV ‘safekeeping homes’, ongoing support to minimize GBV-related trauma, and recognizing the importance of and increasing the role of civil society in the fight against GBV.
NEFF	49% on entire list 20% in top 10 positions	0 out of 2 seats	Party manifesto not accessible.

¹⁵ Eder, N., Jenny, M., & Muller, W. 2017. Manifesto functions: How party candidates view and use their party’s central policy document. *Electoral Studies*, Volume 45, February 2017, Pages 75-87.

NUDO	43% on entire list 20% in top 10 positions	1 out of 2 seats	In its section on 'Women Empowerment and Gender', Nudo promises four things: (1) Women shall be appointed in executive positions on a 50-50 basis. (2) 20 % of the procurement budgets, products shall be sourced from woman-owned businesses. (3) NUDO will provide collateral free microfinance for women entrepreneurs; and (4) NUDO government will strengthen woman, the disabled and orphans access to property and land rights.
PDM	45% on entire list 45% in top 20 positions 50% in top 10 positions	7 out of 16 seats	PDM dedicates 2.5 pages of its manifesto to discussing 'Gender Equality and a Dignified, Fair System', and recognizing that " women still bear the brunt of poverty, infringements of their rights as humans through violence and rape, remaining on the fringes of the economy". Amongst others, the party promises to "roll-out free sanitary pads to vulnerable girls in all regions"; "increase financial support to Gender Equality Organizations and Commissions"; create special courts to deal with Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and have specially-trained police officers to deal with GBV to be available at all police stations; "a gender equality module as part of the school curriculum"; "educational programmes to address issues of corrective rape and the establishment of a task team on LGBTIQA as a new area of focus"; "the prioritization of rural women and youth in land redistribution and acquisition"; and "the creation and implementation of a Service Charter for Victims of Crime (Victims Charter)". The party also presents a number of strategies with regards to how it will 'accelerate women's economic empowerment and social protection' and ensure a dignified life for Namibia women.
RDP	39% on entire list 40% in top 10 positions	0 out of 1 seat	Party manifesto not accessible.
RP	48% on entire list 40% in top 10 positions	0 out of 2 seats	Party manifesto not accessible.
Swanu	39% on entire list 20% in top 10 positions	0 out of 1 seat	Swanu addresses the issue of GBV in its manifesto, and states that it " will undertake comprehensive reforms of the criminal justice system with a view to making Namibia a more humane society of equals." It also promises tougher sentencing for GBV-related crimes. Under its education commitments, Swanu also promises to provide free sanitary pads to girls, as a means of increasing their school attendance.
Swapo	51% on entire list 60% in top 10 positions	32 out of 63 seats	The Swapo party manifesto outlines several different commitments on Women (and Children). Amongst them: "Consolidate programmes to accelerate equitable economic empowerment of women and the youth; Provide teenage-friendly environments at public health centres and clinics; Strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies to respond timely and effectively to incidents of GBV; Establish Gender Based Violence Protection Units in remaining urban centres; Establish more safe houses in the Regions and Magisterial Districts; Accelerate the review of the Combating of Domestic Violence Act of 2003 to improve the efficacy of the protection orders and strengthen the language of other provisions in the Act." The party also commits to "Introduce anger management and counselling programmes at schools and communities to reduce incidences of GBV; Initiate identification and raise awareness of potentially harmful traditional and cultural practices, which impede the fight against GBV and teenage pregnancies to inform future legislation; improve policies and legislation to enable working mothers and their families to feel more protected in cases of maternity; and to foster a conducive environment for women empowerment."
UDF	60% on entire list 40% in top 10 positions	0 out of 2 seats	UDF stated that it would recycle its 2014 manifesto for the 2019 elections, on the basis that the problems facing the country 'remain the same'. In its 2014 manifesto, UDF lists 13 pledges to the electorate, with one of them being "the involvement of women". This is the only mention of women in the manifesto

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ABOUT DEMOCRACY REPORT

Democracy Report is a project of the IPPR which analyses and disseminates information relating to the legislative agenda of Namibia's Parliament. The project aims to promote public participation in debates concerning the work of Parliament by publishing regular analyses of legislation and other issues before the National Assembly and the National Council. Democracy Report is funded by the Embassy of Finland.

ABOUT THE IPPR

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to deliver independent, analytical, critical yet constructive research on social, political and economic issues that affect development in Namibia. The IPPR was established in the belief that development is best promoted through free and critical debate informed by quality research.



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