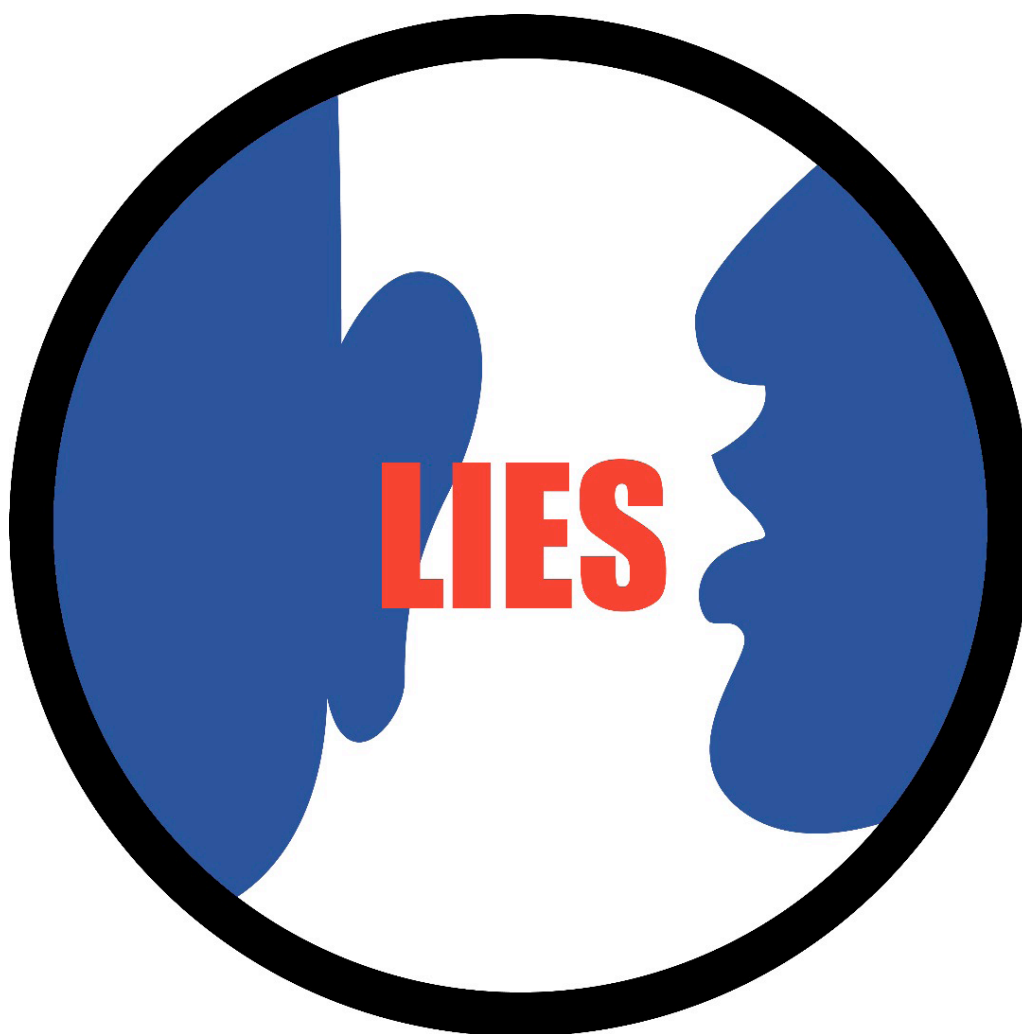


COUNTERING #ELECTIONS2024 MIS- & DISINFORMATION



The political smear campaigns

Political smear campaigns were deployed online ahead of the November 2024 elections. These campaigns were aimed at undermining the reputations, credibility and trust in particular candidates, parties and entities, including the electoral management body and the elections.

What is a political smear campaign?

Smear campaigns have long been part of political campaigning and messaging. In the always-connected age, smear campaigns can be deployed and amplified rapidly via social media and messaging platforms, ensuring that at very little cost smear messaging can reach wide audiences.

But, what exactly is a smear campaign?

A political smear campaign is a deliberate effort to damage the reputation, credibility, or character of a political figure, party, or group. It typically involves spreading false or misleading information, rumours, or accusations to undermine public trust in the target.

According to various online sources, there are two broad aims of a political smear campaign:

- First, to **undermine support for a targeted candidate** or party by attacking their reputation and credibility;
- Second, to **distract from their message or platform** and to silence them.

“a **deliberate** attack on somebody, by spreading an **untrue** and **unpleasant rumour** about them, or by making an **accusation** intended to damage their **reputation**”

Example: He puts all the accusations down to a smear campaign by his political opponents.

Definition from collinsdictionary.com

Here are some common tactics used in smear campaigns:

1. **Personal Attacks:** These focus on the target's character, lifestyle, or past actions, often exaggerating or fabricating details.
2. **Misinformation:** False or distorted information is disseminated to create doubt or suspicion.
3. **Selective Editing:** Statements or actions are taken out of context to portray the target negatively.
4. **Amplification:** The narrative is spread widely through social media, news outlets, or influencers to gain traction.

Smear campaigns are often used during elections or political conflicts to sway public opinion. While they can be effective, they also raise ethical concerns about the integrity of political discourse.

The prominent case study smear campaigns that were visible in social media spaces ahead of the November 2024 elections were:

- A **long-running smear campaign targeting Panduleni Itula**, leader of the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC), that appeared in early 2024 and continued right up to and beyond the elections of late November;
- The smear campaign aimed at the then ruling **Swapo Party** presidential candidate, **Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah**, and that focused on her health and fitness, but that also made other damaging allegations against her character and loyalty to the party;
- A campaign aimed at **undermining the credibility of the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) and the elections**, alleging that the ECN was working with the ruling party, the Chinese, and the Zimbabwean ruling party, Zanu PF, to rig the elections in favour of the Swapo Party.

The smear campaigns

While there were a number of smear campaigns active on the electoral information landscape before and around the 27 November 2024 elections, the consistent and sustained attacks on the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) and its leader, Panduleni Itula, were arguably the most visible. Also quite visible were the attacks on the ruling Swapo Party candidate for the presidential election, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah.

The Itula-IPC smear campaign

By all indications this was the longest running campaign, with the attacks sustained through most of the election year. This campaign mainly laundered two narratives, namely:

- 1. That Panduleni Itula was a British citizen and ‘puppet’;
- 2. That the IPC was a front for foreign (British) interests and a security threat.

International Development Committee

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From Sarah Champion MP, Chair

The Rt Hon Lord Cameron
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
By email

23 May 2024

Dear Foreign Secretary Cameron,

Bolstering Support for IPC in The Republic of Namibia

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to underscore the strategic importance of our continued support for the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) in The Republic of Namibia, under the leadership of Dr Panduleni Itula.

As you are aware, we have committed significant financial resources to bolster IPC's efforts in the upcoming elections. Specifically, a sum of £750,000 has been transferred to the party's bank account at First National Bank of Namibia. This funding is crucial to ensuring that IPC can mount a robust campaign against the incumbent regime.

In addition to the financial support, we have provided IPC with a convoy of campaign vehicles to facilitate their outreach and mobilization efforts across the country. This logistical support is vital for their on-ground campaign activities and will enable them to reach a broader segment of the Namibian populace.


During recent discussions with IPC's leadership, their chairman Brian Black and Vice President Trevino Forbes, the UK government has agreed to offer political assistance in their campaign to support human rights groups in Namibia. This aligns with our broader commitment to promoting human rights globally and represents a significant step forward in a region where rights such as those afforded to LGBTIQI communities are often under threat from extremist elements in the ruling Swapo Party and leftist parties such as the NEFF.

Furthermore, I must highlight the engagement between prominent business leaders in the petroleum industry and IPC chairman Mr. Brian Black. These leaders have received assurances of favorable conditions and positioning in Namibia's emerging oil economy, contingent upon IPC's success in the elections. This potential for economic partnership is a critical consideration in our continued support.

Given the above, I urge you to reinforce our commitment to IPC and ensure that all necessary measures are taken to support their efforts. Our involvement is not only an investment in Namibia's democratic future but also a strategic move to secure our interests in the region.

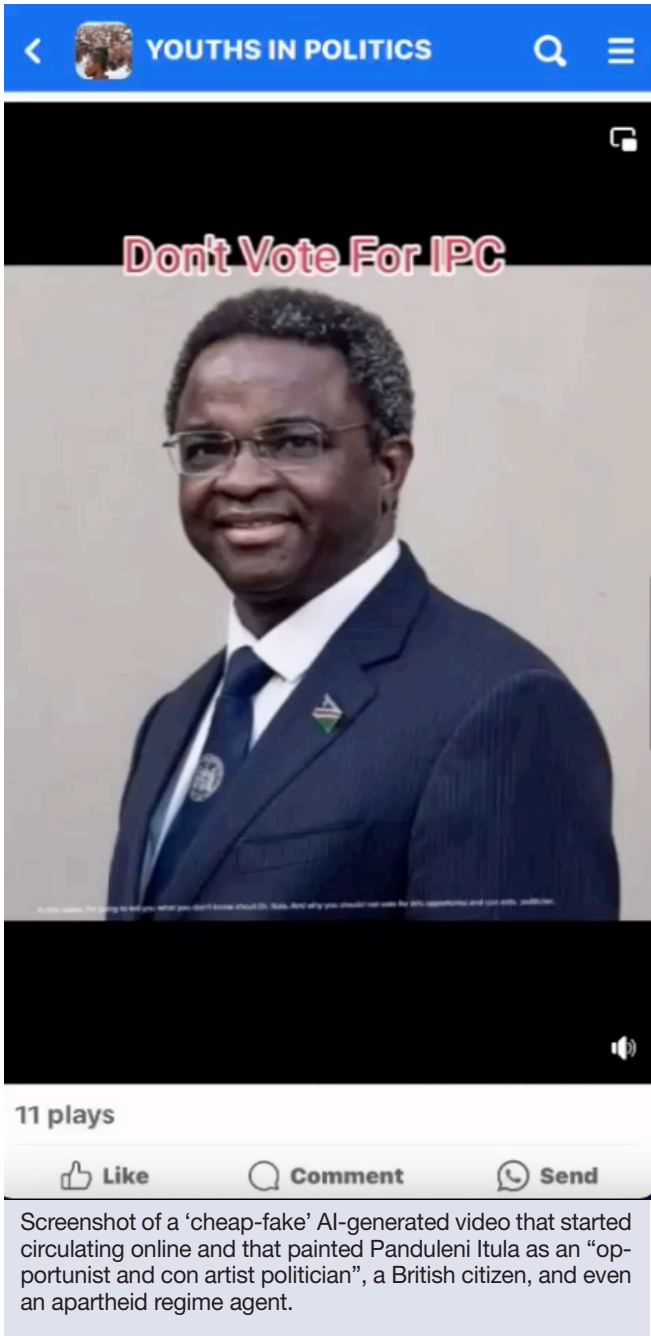
Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to discussing this further at your earliest convenience.

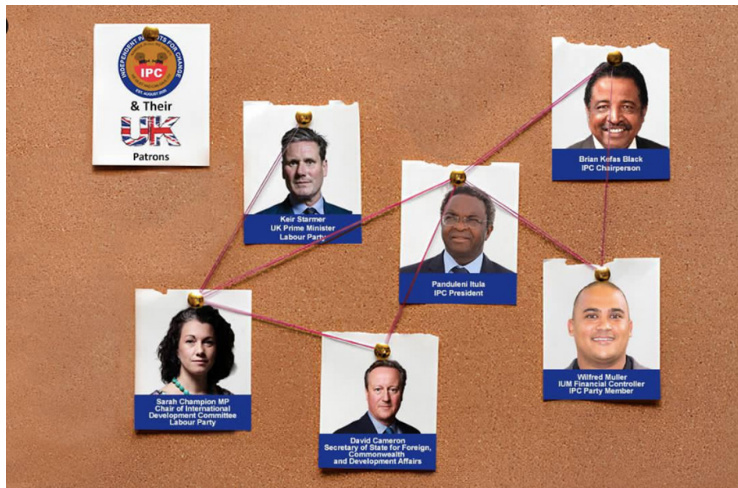
Yours sincerely,



Sarah Champion MP
Chair of the Committee

In May 2024 this fake letter that was claimed to be penned by a UK member of parliament, Sarah Champion, was circulating online to reinforce the smear that the IPC and Itula were funded by the British government.





Screenshot of an image that appeared in various social media spaces around mid-2024 and that was aimed at cementing the narrative that the IPC was foreign (UK) funded and controlled and a front for regime change in Namibia.



Screenshot of a fake Zimbabwean police media release that circulated online in July 2024 and formed the basis of a report published by Ghanaian diaspora focused GhanaWeb that amplified a false claim that a secret IPC military training camp was raided in Zimbabwe and that IPC members were arrested. The aim was to portray the party as a security threat. The disinformation incident led to the Zimbabwean police having to issue a statement to refute the claim of such a raid having taken place and such a camp having been found in the country.

The Nandi-Ndaitwah smear campaign

During the second-half of 2024 a smear campaign started to become visible and gained prominence by targeting the ruling Swapo Party candidate for the Namibian presidency, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. The campaign also mainly laundered two narratives:

1. That Nandi-Ndaitwah was a traitor within the ruling party;
2. That she was too old and unhealthy to become president.



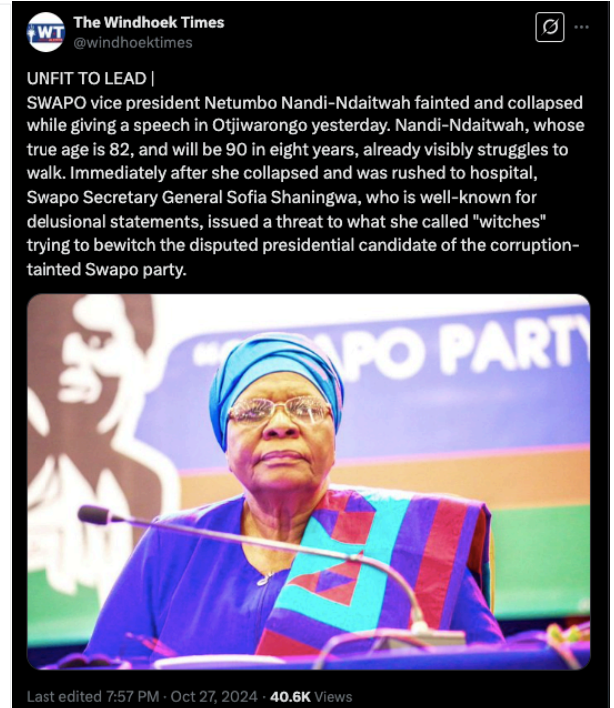
Screenshot of a 'Deep Intelligence' post that circulated throughout the latter half of 2024 in various social mediaspaces, portraying Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah as a "CIA asset", who was "advancing gay rights with the Americans".



Screenshot of another 'Deep Intelligence' post that circulated throughout late 2024 in social media spaces and that cast Nandi-Ndaitwah as a "former apartheid undercover agent", as part of the narrative that she could not be trusted and was a traitor.



Screenshot of an AI-generated 'cheap-fake' video that supposedly showed the 'collapse' of Nandi-Ndaitwah at a party rally at Otjiwarongo, Otjozondjupa Region, at the end of October 2024. This video, that circulated online and in WhatsApp spaces through November 2024, emerged almost immediately after the supposed 'collapse' occurred and formed part of the narrative campaign that painted Nandi-Ndaitwah as too unwell, unhealthy, and old to be Namibia's president.

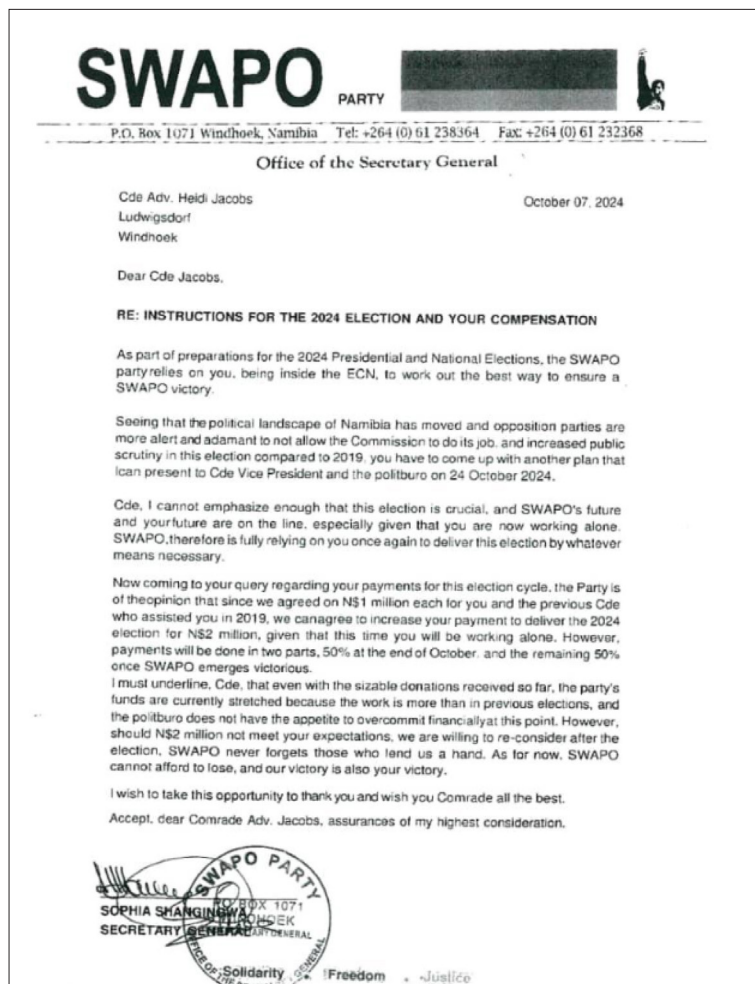


Screenshot of a post by the partisan X account titled 'The Windhoek Times' which also promoted the narrative that Nandi-Ndaitwah was "UNFIT TO LEAD" following her 'collapse' at a rally in late October 2024.

The ECN smear campaign

Through the second-half of 2024, with the elections approaching, election-focused mis- and disinformation actors also started targeting the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) with smears. The main narrative being laundered was:

- That the ECN would rig the elections in favour of the ruling Swapo Party.

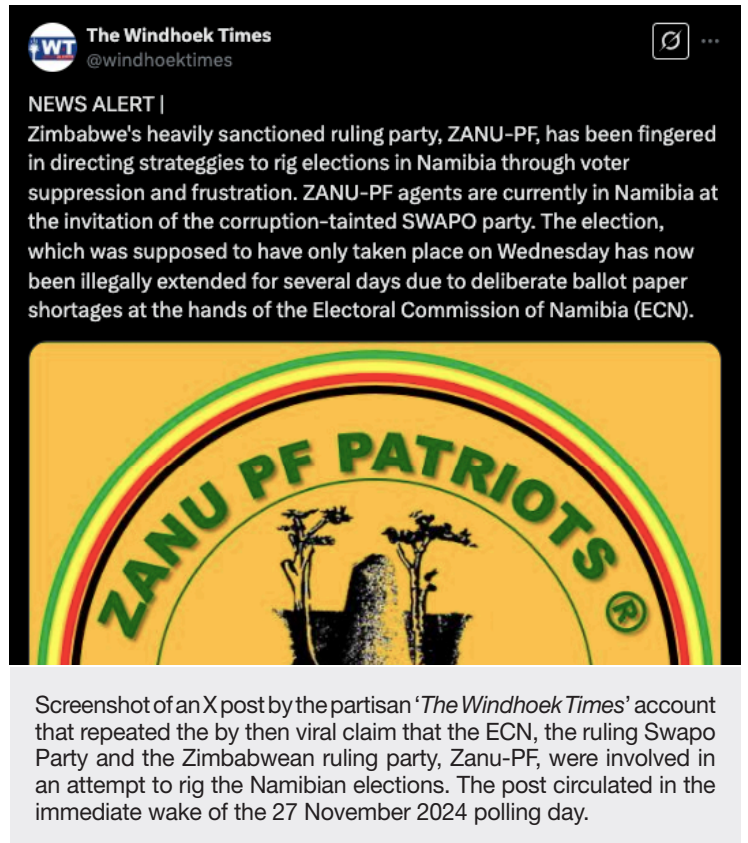


Screenshot of a fake 'letter' that circulated virally online in October and November 2024. The 'letter' was claimed to have been issued by the Swapo Party secretary general, Sophia Shaningwa, and instructed ECN legal adviser, Heidi Jacobs, to "deliver the elections" for the ruling party. The letter stated that Jacobs would be paid for ensuring the elections were "delivered". The ECN had to issue a statement to refute the authenticity of the letter and to defend the integrity of its senior official.

For more on this, read [Namibia Fact Check's report](#).



On election day, 27 November 2024, some social media accounts were spreading election-related mis- and disinformation. This is a screenshot of a post by an X influencer account titled 'African' that insinuated that a ballot box had been tampered with. This fed into a widespread narrative that election materials shortages and the mishandling of electoral processes at various voting points across the country throughout the day was evidence of an ECN attempt to rig the elections.



Screenshot of an X post by the partisan 'The Windhoek Times' account that repeated the by then viral claim that the ECN, the ruling Swapo Party and the Zimbabwean ruling party, Zanu-PF, were involved in an attempt to rig the Namibian elections. The post circulated in the immediate wake of the 27 November 2024 polling day.

Some of the information in this document was gathered and compiled using Microsoft's AI app Copilot.

For more on this and other topics investigated, access the full report at www.ippr.org.na and www.namibiafactcheck.org.na

This bulletin was produced by **Namibia Fact Check**, a project of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).

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