

COUNTERING #ELECTIONS2024 MIS- & DISINFORMATION



Poor journalism fueling election mis- & disinformation

Poor reporting and media mistakes contributed to the spread of false information by amplifying smear campaigns and participating in narrative laundering in the run-up to and beyond the November 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections in Namibia.

How do media mistakes and poor reporting fuel election mis- & disinformation?

Media mistakes and poor reporting can significantly contribute to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, eroding public trust and distorting narratives. Here's how:

1. Inaccurate Reporting Creates Confusion

When journalists fail to verify facts or misinterpret data, errors can quickly spread. For example, [Namibia Fact Check](#) has repeatedly highlighted instances where Namibian media misreported government announcements, leading to public confusion. These mistakes can be exploited by bad actors to push false narratives. For instance, in November 2024, *New Era* reported on its front page that the Swapo Party "intends creating 5 000 jobs in five years", based on statements made by the party's then presidential election candidate, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, at a campaign rally. Nandi-Ndaitwah had actually said that the party would create "more than 500 000 jobs in five years".

In November 2024, *New Era* inaccurately reported off the front page that the Swapo Party promised to create "5 000 jobs in five years."

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



2. Sensationalism Amplifies False Claims

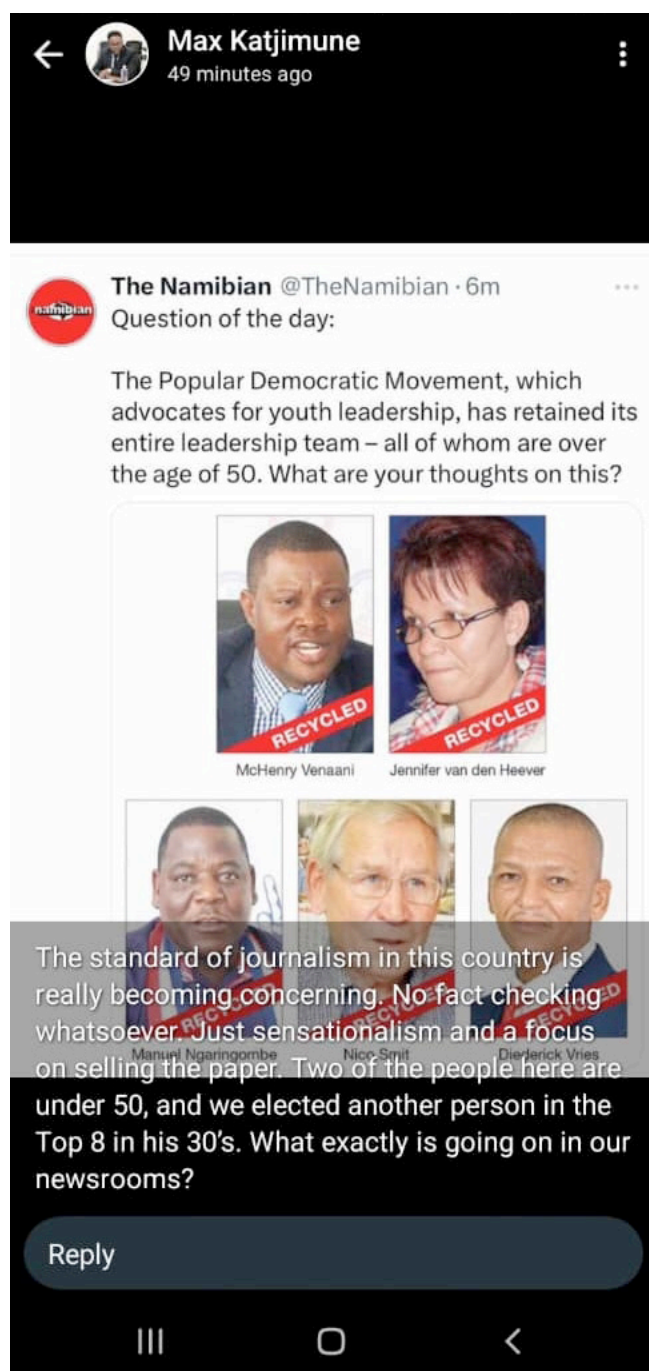
Some media outlets prioritise attention-grabbing headlines over accuracy. In November 2024, days before the elections, *New Era* carried a front page report that sensationalised the attendance of the British high commissioner at an event at Walvis Bay, thereby giving credence to unproven claims that the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) was British government funded. Such exaggerations can mislead audiences and fuel misinformation.



In November 2024, *New Era* reporting off the front page amplified false or unproven claims that the opposition Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) was funded by the British government.

5. Public Distrust in Media Grows

Repeated mistakes erode confidence in journalism. A 2019 Afrobarometer survey found that 62% of Namibians viewed the media as sources of fake news and journalists as untrustworthy, and 64% supported government restrictions on false information. This distrust makes audiences more vulnerable to disinformation campaigns.



In August 2024, following the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) elective congress *The Namibian* reported about the party's "recycled" leadership, including inviting readers to comment on the party's "recycled" leadership via social media. In the post above, the newspaper falsely claimed that all of the party's leadership was aged over 50. Poor reporting on basic matters of fact is why there appears to be deteriorating trust in Namibia's mainstream news media and journalists.

International media also made mistakes

It wasn't just Namibian media and journalists that were engaging in bad reporting ahead of and around Namibia's November 2025 elections. Some media reporting from the SADC region, as well as international media, also carried mistakes, spreading falsehoods about aspects of Namibia's elections.

Following are some examples of poor reporting by regional and international media.

1. The Newzroom Afrika 'polls'

[Polls suggest Swapo to lose elections](#)



Polls suggest Swapo to lose elections

From <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91u0PWeraQ>>

In the lead-up to the 27 November general election in Namibia, polls indicate that Swapo, which has triumphed in all elections since Namibia's independence in 1990, might face defeat for the first time. Nordic Africa Institute analyst and senior advisor Prof. Henning Melber discusses expectations on the upcoming elections.

From <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91u0PWeraQ>>

Above is a screenshot of the original headline and introductory text of a *Newzroom Afrika* report on Youtube from early November 2024 that falsely stated that there were "polls" pointing to the ruling Swapo Party losing its majority in the 27 November 2024 elections.

Following *Namibia Fact Check's* questioning of the "polls" being referred to, the South Africa-based *Newzroom Afrika* changed the headline and introductory text (image below). However, in his introductory statement, the anchor still refers to "polls" indicating that the Swapo Party was going to lose the elections.

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

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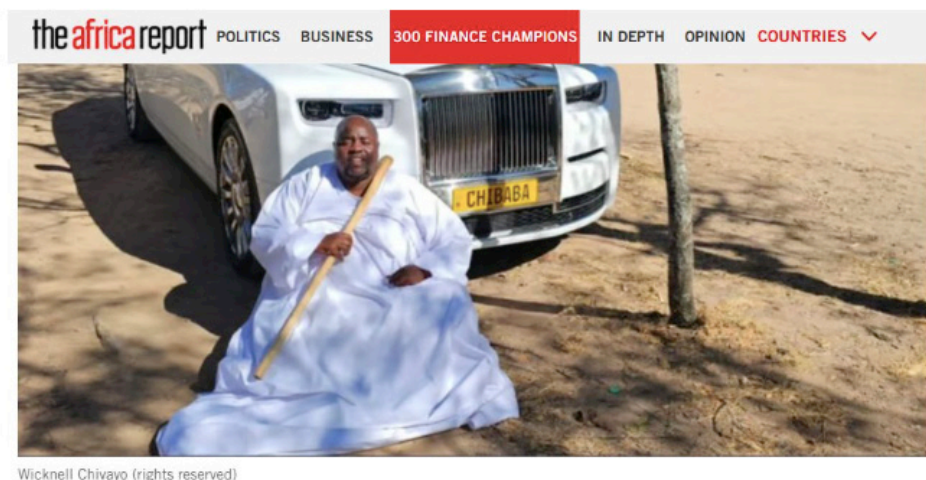
38,995 views Nov 8, 2024

In the lead-up to the November 27 general elections in Namibia, where liberation movement Swapo has been in power since independence, Nordic Africa Institute's Prof. Henning Melber unpacks what to expect in the upcoming polls.

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2. The ECN's "\$60 million" ballot printing tender

On 13 November 2024, the Paris, France, based The Africa Report published an article titled 'Is Namibia poll at risk from ballot papers printed by firm linked to Zimbabwe ex-convict'. The introduction (see image below) of the report falsely stated that the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) had contracted a South African company to print Namibia's ballot papers at a cost of US\$60 million. In reality the ballot paper printing contract cost about N\$6.3 million, which was about US\$330,000 at the exchange rate at the time.



Wicknell Chivayo (rights reserved)

Namibia's electoral commission under fire over 'emergency' contract awarded to company linked to Wicknell Chivayo.

There was uproar in [Namibia](#) in October after it was revealed that a South African company, Ren-Form CC, linked to former convict and [Zimbabwean](#) Wicknell Chivayo, was awarded a \$60m contract by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) to print ballot papers for Namibia's general elections on 27 November to elect a new president and members of the National Assembly.

The report went viral in Namibian social media spaces and the figure was repeated by various Zimbabwe-focused social media pages, such as ZimCelebs (image below).



ZimCelebs' headline repeated the false "US\$60 million" claim.

Even award-winning investigative journalist, Hopewell Chin'ono, with large followings on various social media platforms, repeated the false "US\$60 million" ballot paper printing tender claim (image right).

When questioned by [Namibia Fact Check](#) about where he had come across the "US\$60 million" figure, The Africa Report journalist pointed to an 18 October 2024 report by another Zimbabwe-focused online news outlet, *ZimLive*, as the source of the figure (image below).



The *ZimLive* article (above) appears to have been the source of the "US\$60 million" ballot paper printing tender claim.

In the wake of [Namibia Fact Check's](#) questioning of the origin of the "US\$60 million" ballot paper printing tender claim, The Africa Report changed its introduction of the article to the following, without acknowledging its mistake.



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

3. The Economist's errors

In early December 2024, days after the announcement of the results of Namibia's late November elections, *The Economist* published an article (see image right) providing an overview of the recently concluded Namibian elections for an international audience. However, the article, titled 'SWAPO hangs on', contained a number of mistakes.

First, the article claimed that a "two-thirds-threshold" was needed in Namibia's parliament to pass laws and, secondly, that Swapo would need "to cosy up to opposition parties" to pass laws. Both of these statements are false, as a simple majority is needed to pass laws in the National Assembly and thus Swapo will not need to cosy up to opposition parties to pass laws. Third, the article stated that Swapo's percentage from previous elections "dropped from 87% to 65%", which was a reference to the party's 2014 and 2019 election vote-share.

However, Swapo did not get 87% of the vote in 2014, but rather 80%. Fourth, the article stated that from 2025 the "daily minimum wage for farm workers will be ten Namibian dollars (55 American cents)". This is false, because as from 2025, the hourly minimum wage of farm workers is N\$10 (ten Namibia dollars), not the daily minimum wage.

These basic errors undermine the credibility of *The Economist* brand, and underscores the criticisms of how the Western media have tended to report on Africa for the longest time.



How can the news media and journalists improve?

News media and journalists can do the following:

- Strengthening fact-checking processes;
- Providing clearer context in reporting;
- Avoiding sensationalism and misleading headlines;
- Holding journalists accountable for errors.

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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