

COUNTERING #ELECTIONS2024 MIS- & DISINFORMATION



Was there foreign influence in the 2024 elections?

The electoral landscape was alive with claims, suspicions and speculation that foreign interests were meddling or attempting to do so, on behalf of local political actors, in the presidential and parliamentary elections of November 2024. Was there any truth to such perceptions and claims and is there something to be concerned about for the future?



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What is a foreign influence campaign?

A **foreign influence campaign** is a coordinated effort by a foreign entity, often a government or affiliated organisation, in collaboration with and / or in the interest of a local partner or entity to shape public opinion, policy decisions, or electoral outcomes in a country. These campaigns are usually covert (such as disinformation operations or cyber interference).

Key characteristics of foreign influence campaigns include:

- **Disinformation & Propaganda:** Spreading misleading or false narratives to manipulate public perception.
- **Financial Influence:** Funding political groups, think tanks, or media outlets to push specific agendas.
- **Social Media Manipulation:** Using bots, fake accounts, or influencers to amplify certain viewpoints.

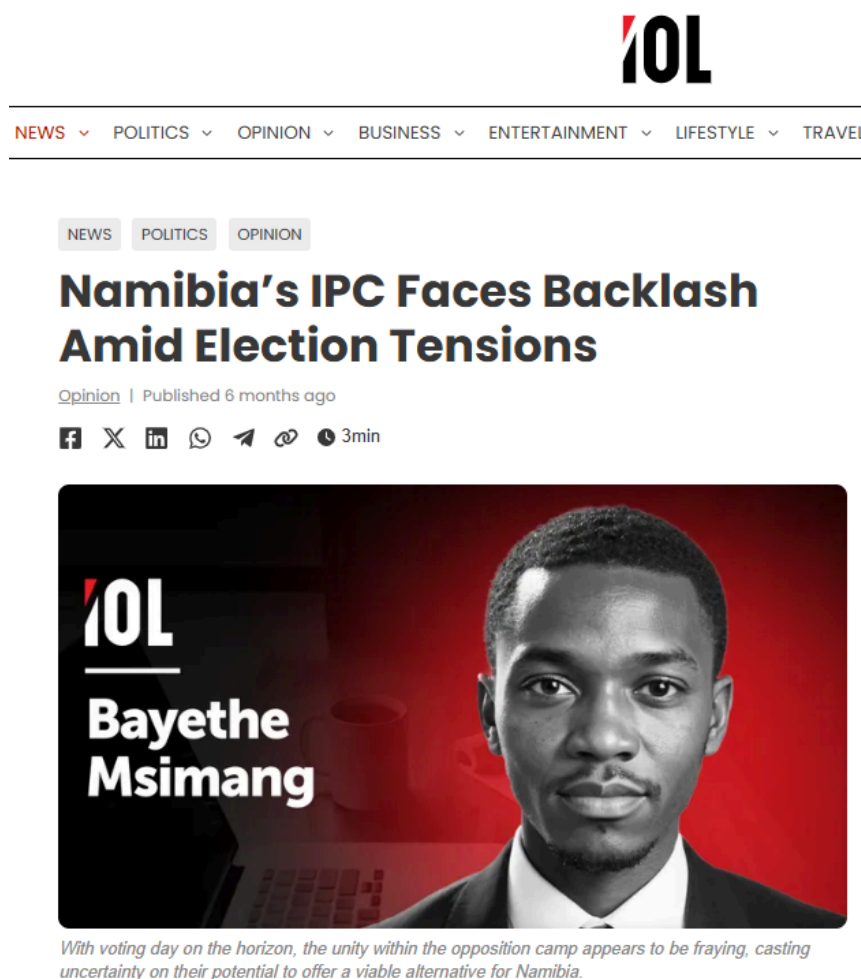
While some forms of foreign influence, like cultural exchanges or diplomatic engagement, are legitimate, malign influence campaigns aim to undermine democratic processes, sow division, or advance strategic interests through deceptive means.

In the run-up to Namibia's November 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections speculation was rife that foreign interests or entities were trying to manipulate Namibian public perceptions of certain politicians and / or political parties. However, while such speculation and allegations have circulated and swirled, it is unclear whether what was witnessed on the electoral information landscape was orchestrated by foreign interests or entities or by Namibian political interests using foreign channels. Suffice to say, as the following examples indicate, foreign actors were definitely active in trying to influence Namibian voters, especially online, ahead of the elections of late-November 2024.

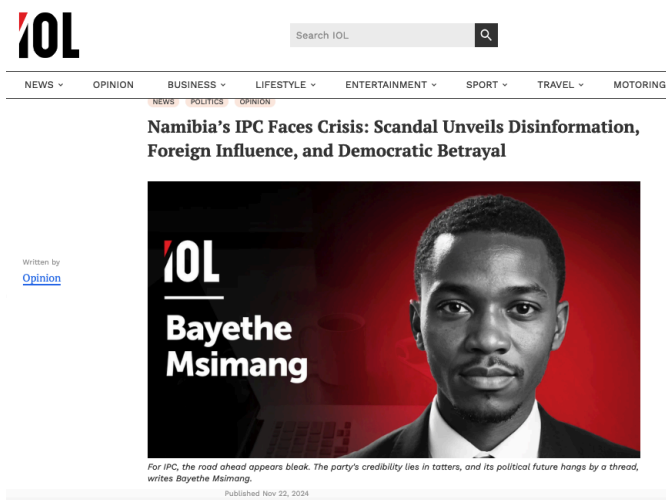
The examples discussed in this bulletin, along with others, indicate that foreign influence campaigns around elections and politics have become an issue that Namibians should be concerned about.

1. Disinformation & Propaganda

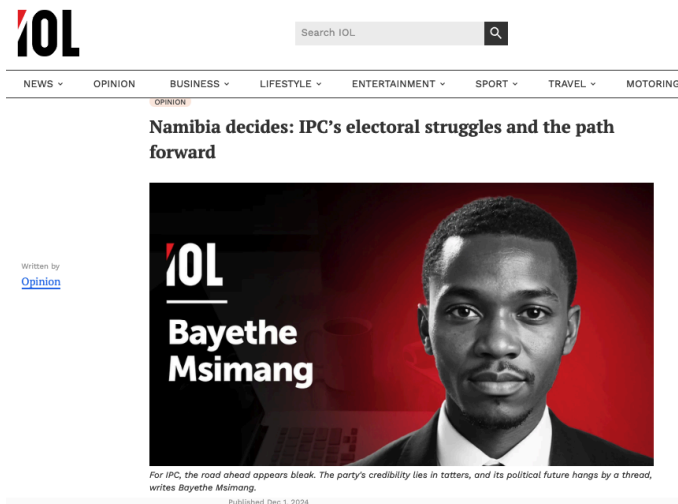
In early November 2024, weeks away from the 27 November 2024 elections day, the first in a series of 'articles' published by *South Africa's Independent Online (IOL)* and written by someone named Bayethe Msimang started circulating in social media and WhatsApp spaces attacking the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC). Two 'articles' appeared before the elections and one immediately afterwards, on 1 December 2024. The 'articles' were highly speculative and contained falsehoods and repeated narratives similar to narrative laundering attempts from earlier in the year that primarily painted the IPC as a foreign-funded and controlled party. The articles also pushed the narrative that Namibia's opposition parties were weak, disorganised and dysfunctional. The 'articles' were clearly an attempt to spread disinformation and propaganda.



Screenshot of the first of three 'articles' by Bayethe Msimang published by IOL in early November 2024.



Screenshot of the second of three 'articles' published by IOL, and authored by Bayethe Msimang, just a week before the 27 November elections day.



Screenshot of the last 'article', published by IOL on 1 December 2024, written by Bayethe Msimang about the Namibian elections.

2. Financial Influence

Just over four months before the elections, on 15 July 2024, *The Namibian* newspaper received a request from a Lagos, Nigeria, based public relations agency for the publication of "sponsored news stories" (image below). In an email exchange with The Namibian, the PR agency attached an example of the "sponsored news stories" they would submit for publication by the newspaper. The sample article that was attached was a report based on a fake letter suggesting that the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) was funded by the British government. Ultimately, during correspondence with the PR firm, *The Namibian* declined to publish the offered "sponsored news stories". Based on the correspondence, it was clear that the Nigerian PR firm was offering to pay for the placement of the 'articles' in the newspaper and on its website, thereby exercising financial influence over a significant news media entity.

From: Celestine Achi <celestine.achi@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, 15 July 2024 11:48 am
To: salesdepartment@namibian.com.na
Subject: Inquiry about sponsored articles

Good morning Editor,

I would like to inquire about publishing sponsored news stories (articles) on your news platform.

Your response will be most appreciated.

I am hoping this will signal a mutual beneficial Relationship.

For a start, I would like to start with the attached article and we can have up to 4 of this on a monthly basis.

Hoping to hear from you soon

—
Celestine Achi
 Chief Digital Transformation Strategists
Cihan Media Communications
 A GrowthPR Tech Agency
 +234 803 7197175
celestine@cihanmediacomms.com

....It will end in praise

Screenshot (left) of an email received by *The Namibian*, enquiring about "publishing sponsored news stories" in the newspaper, from a Lagos, Nigeria, based public relations firm on 15 July 2024.

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDS IPC AND ITS FUNDING AMID NEW LEAKED LETTER




By Lazarus Odenge

Namibia is currently experiencing political attention due to the circulation of a letter mentioning the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) in connection with financial activities. This letter, widely shared on social media, suggests a link between the IPC and the UK Labour Party, prompting inquiries about the party's funding and affiliations.



Screenshot of a Word document showing the introduction of an 'article' submitted by a Nigerian public relations firm for publication in *The Namibian* in July 2024. The PR firm states in its correspondence that it wanted to submit four (4) articles "on a monthly basis" to the newspaper for publication in the run-up to the 27 November 2024 elections.

On the same day that *The Namibian* newspaper received the email request for the publication of "sponsored news stories" from the Nigerian PR firm, Ghanaian news aggregation website *GhanaWeb* published a report that was almost word-for-word similar to the 'article' that the Nigerian PR firm was requesting *The Namibian* to publish. This points to a coordinated influence campaign using foreign-based entities and news and online channels to spread specific political narratives.




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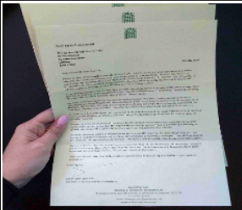
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Opinions of Monday, 15 July 2024 Columnist: Séraphin Fouda [Disclaimer](#)

Controversy surrounds IPC and its shady funding amid new leaked letter

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A photo of the leaked IPC letter

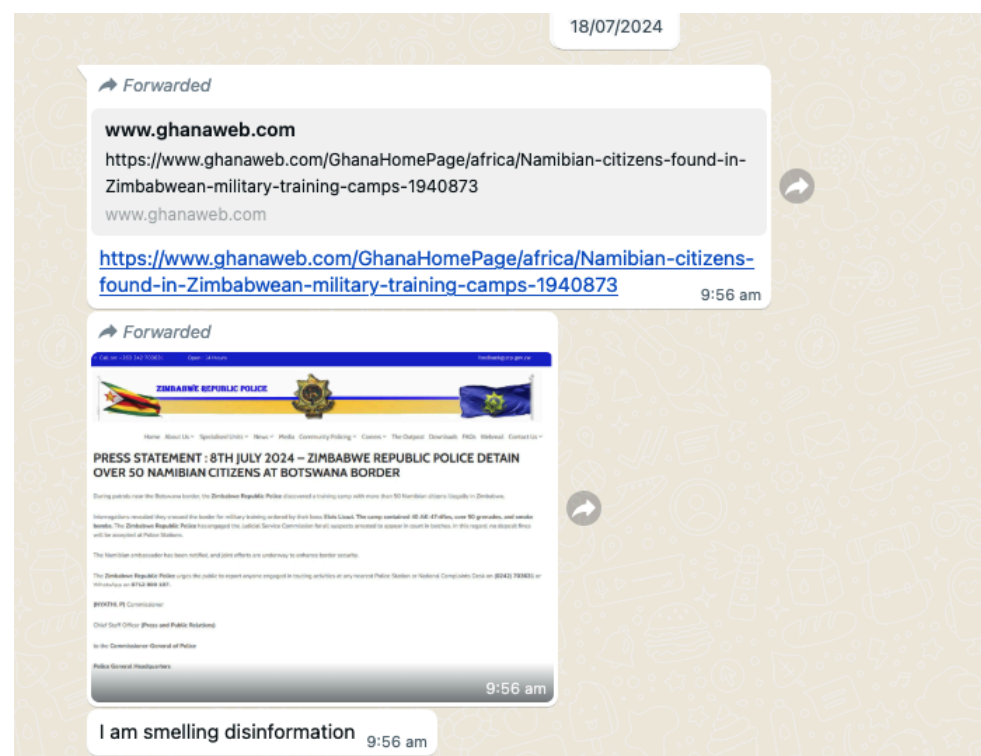
Namibia has found itself at the centre of a political maelstrom following the circulation of yet another letter implicating the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) in dubious financial dealings.

The letter, which has been widely disseminated across social media platforms, suggests a connection between the IPC and the UK Labour Party, raising critical questions about the party's funding sources and political affiliations.

Despite the photo of the letter making rounds online, the IPC has steadfastly maintained that it has no political ties either within Namibia or internationally.

This claim, however, is met with doubt due to the party leader Panduleni Itula's significant connections to the United Kingdom. Itula spent over 33 years in the UK before returning to Namibia in 2013.

Screenshot of an article on the *GhanaWeb* website that repeats the claim that the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) elections campaign was funded by the British government. The claim centred around a 'letter' that supposedly came from a British parliamentarian, as well as insinuating that IPC leader Panduleni Itula might be a British agent or puppet. The *GhanaWeb* article was almost identical to the text submitted by a Nigerian PR firm to *The Namibian* on the same date for publication by the newspaper.



Screenshot (left) ... of a WhatsApp message received by *Namibia Fact Check* alerting it to another article published by *GhanaWeb*, this time about the IPC being implicated in the existence of a secret military training camp in Zimbabwe that had been raided by Zimbabwean police. The ‘article’ appeared a few days after the one about the circulating ‘letter’ showing the IPC was receiving funding from the British government. According to the fake “Press Statement” in the image, over 50 Namibians were arrested and the IPC was identified as being behind the secret military training camp. Upon enquiry by *Namibia Fact Check*, through Zimbabwean media intermediaries, the Zimbabwean police stated that the “Press Statement” was fake and that no such camp had been found. The disinformation had thus become a minor diplomatic incident. The *GhanaWeb* article quickly disappeared from the website shortly after this, so the link in the image is no longer active.

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

3. Social Media Manipulation

During the electoral campaigning phase ahead of the 27 November 2024 parliamentary and presidential elections various political parties, actors or associated interests engaged in social media manipulation, and one of the ways in which they did this was by co-opting social media influencers to promote content favourable to one or other political party or candidate. Arguably the highest profile social media influencer active on the Namibian electoral information landscape ahead of and around the elections was Ali Naka, whose X (Twitter) handle is “African”, who was messaging on behalf of or in favour of the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC). Ali Naka has become prominent for posting in support of many African political causes and against the Zimbabwean ruling party, Zanu PF, and the Zimbabwean government. Ali Naka’s activities on the Namibian electoral information landscape are examples of an influencer account amplifying certain political viewpoints and messages.

Screenshot (right) of an X (Twitter) post by foreign social media influencer Ali Naka, which online sources say is Zimbabwean, attacking another Zimbabwean X user. In the post, Ali Naka repeated the unproven claim that the Zimbabwean ruling party, Zanu PF, was influencing Namibia’s elections and was even engaged in rigging the elections with the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN). Ali Naka used his account, which has almost half a million followers on X, to repeatedly message on behalf of the IPC or to amplify IPC messages in the run-up to and beyond the elections.





Screenshot of an X (Twitter) post by social media influencer Ali Naka following the November 2024 elections promoting an IPC event.

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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