NAMIBIA FACT CHECK

IPPR

MARCH 2025

COUNTERING #ELECTIONS2024 MIS- & DISINFORMATION

A guide to narratives, actors and pathways around Namibia's 2024 elections

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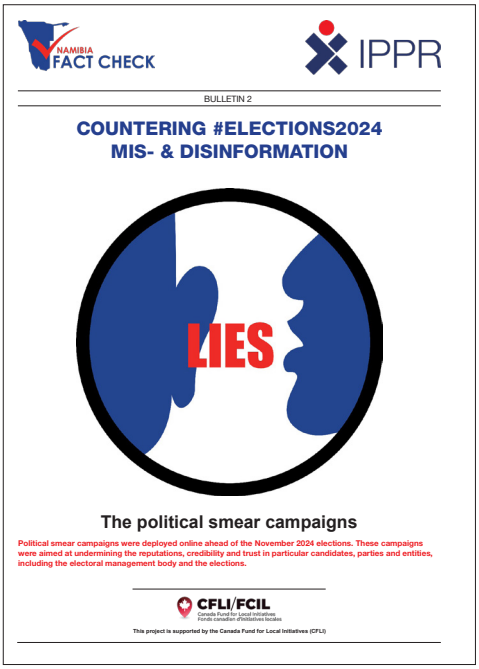

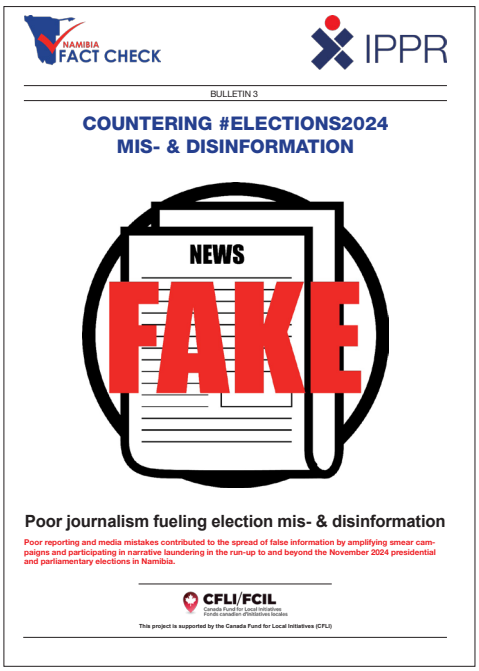

The Countering #Elections2024 Mis- & Disinformation bulletins can be accessed @ www.ippr.org.na and www.namibiafactcheck.org.na

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1. Key Observations & Recommendations

Namibia's presidential and parliamentary elections were conducted from 27 to 30 November 2024. The 2024 election year was marked by electioneering from the start as political actors and interests started jockeying for prominence and public attention on the electoral information landscape and in media and social media spaces from early on. At the same time that election politics was dominating headlines and discussions in social media spaces, a tide of election-related mis- and disinformation was building and rolling as the year progressed and the elections drew closer.

Against this backdrop, the following was observed:

- Election-related mis- and disinformation started circulating in Namibian social media and social messaging spaces from early in 2024;
- Abuse of social media by disinformation actors and spreaders was continuous throughout 2024 as election-related mis- and disinformation campaigns were sustained up to and beyond the polling period;
- While Facebook remained an important platform for the spread of election-related mis- and disinformation, WhatsApp appeared to be the preferred platform for spreading election-related mis- and disinformation;
- For the first time in Namibia, Tik Tok also emerged as a significant platform for the spread of election-related content, including mis- and disinformation content;
- There were concerted and coordinated disinformation campaigns visible across and in various social media spaces;
- There were long-running smear campaigns visibly active across platforms against both the ruling and opposition parties and their respective candidates, as well as against electoral authorities and the Namibian government;
- The smear campaigns included content created by foreign actors, including influencers, and laundered via both domestic and foreign online sources and platforms;
- Smear campaigns included narrative laundering activities via various online sources and news media manipulation;
- Namibian news media compounded the spread of election-related mis- and disinformation with poor reporting practices and by mostly engaging in surface-level reporting (primarily event and speech-based) which made them complicit in the narrative laundering activities of disinformation actors;
- Namibian news media engaged in very little and limited in-house fact checking of political platforms and politicians and rather relied on outside fact checking services, such as *Namibia Fact Check*;
- Poor reporting and media mistakes by regional and international news media also contributed to the spread of election-related mis- and disinformation;
- Artificial intelligence (AI) generated content, including disinformation content, circulated virally in online and social messaging spaces from early on in 2024;
- AI-generated content formed part of the smear and narrative laundering campaigns that were visible throughout the election year;
- The AI-generated content was however more cheap-fake, rather than deep-fake, and thus easily recognisable and detectable;
- Electoral management authorities came across as ill-equipped and unprepared to counter election-related mis- and disinformation that included continuous attacks on electoral integrity;
- Political parties, politicians, their supporters and sympathisers were all complicit in the spread of election-related mis- and disinformation, primarily via social media and messaging platforms.

Recommendations

Considering the above, the following recommendations are made:

For relevant Namibian authorities:

- Initiate, develop, and implement, through multistakeholder and multi-disciplinary consultative and decision-making processes, comprehensive civic and political, media and information, and digital literacy frameworks to counter the pervasive exposure to and spread of mis- and disinformation online and enhance online information integrity;
- Support and collaborate with relevant stakeholders in initiatives aimed at the continuous production and dissemination of public interest media and information and digital literacy content, both online and off-line.

For the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN):

- Formalise the implementation of the 'Principles and Guidelines for the Use of Digital and Social Media in Elections in Africa', which the ECN helped craft, and which are aimed at guiding approaches to the use and impact of digital and social media on African elections;
- Support and collaborate, through multistakeholder processes, with relevant stakeholders in initiatives aimed at the continuous production and dissemination of election-related media and information literacy content.

For the news media:

- Create in-house fact checking desks and processes, not only around elections, but as standard editorial practice, in order to minimise mistakes and poor reporting and to start to rebuild and regain public trust in journalism and the broader news media;
- Engage in media and information, and digital, literacy initiatives as part of its educative function, and collaborate with and support partners that initiate and engage in such activities.

For civil society:

- Initiate and collaborate with the government, the electoral management body, and the media in initiatives aimed at ensuring electoral information integrity;
- Meaningfully engage in law and policy making processes that seek to create comprehensive civic and political, media and information, and digital literacy frameworks to counter the pervasive exposure to and spread of mis- and disinformation online.

2. Introduction

Namibia had its presidential and parliamentary elections on 27 November 2024 – with organisational and logistical issues forcing an extension of the polling period to 29 and 30 November 2024. For months leading up to election day the electoral information landscape had become increasingly polluted with all sorts of politics and election-related mis- and disinformation.

In some respects it was a repetition of the tide witnessed ahead of and around the November 2019 elections, which saw the ruling Swapo Party of Namibia lose its iron-grip two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. The electoral information landscape of that year was unlike any seen before, as it was the first time that social media really constituted a large swath of the landscape.[1] And, according to a 2019 mapping study conducted by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), the two-year period leading up to the elections of 2019, suggested that politics and election-related mis- and disinformation would surge markedly as the elections drew closer.[2] This turned out to be the case.

That said, countries across the continent have had the same experience before and since Namibia's November 2019 elections.

In May 2022, the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) released its finding of a five-country study into election-related mis- and disinformation. It labelled elections as "disinformation drivers" and noted that politics-related disinformation "tends to spike during election periods".[3]

The study also found that across the five African countries, political actors were the main instigators of election and politics-related mis- and disinformation, and that they used various tactics in their information manipulation campaigns.

A more recent CIPESA study – also a multi-country study and conducted in collaboration with the Bertelsmann Stiftung – from 2024[4] showed similar findings as the earlier one, echoing that elections were heightened periods of mis- and disinformation circulation and exposure across all the studied countries and similarly flagged government and political actors as primary sources and spreaders of political and election-related digital mis- and disinformation.

The issue of social media platforms' amplification effect on the spread and reach of digital mis- and disinformation is one that has been especially vexing since 2020, when a global tide of health-related digital mis- and disinformation, which has yet to fully subside, washed around the world with the Covid-19 pandemic. This tide was labelled a "disinfodemic" by UNESCO in 2020.[5]

That was also the year since when politics and elections-related digital mis- and disinformation has really become an affliction of pressing global concern. Since 2020 scores of countries have held important elections that have in greater or lesser degrees been impacted by politics and elections-related digital mis- and disinformation, as the CIPESA and numerous other studies over the last five years indicate. In 2024, seven Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states, among them Namibia, conducted important elections. Indications are that the electoral information landscapes of all of these countries were searingly marked by politics and election-related digital mis- and disinformation.

The surging scourge of digital mis- and disinformation led to the adoption of UN General Assembly resolution 76/227, titled 'Countering disinformation and promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms', in December 2021 that positioned the prevalence of digital mis- and disinformation as a multidimensional threat to individuals, communities and societies.[6]

While the topic of digital mis- and disinformation has attracted much study, condemnation and pronouncement, and mitigation intervention, the ascendance of artificial intelligence (AI) enabled technologies has raised the threat posed to considerably higher levels over recent years. AI has the potential to both deepen the damage wrought by pervasive digital mis- and disinformation and to effectively counteract the damaging impacts. Which way this swings was not yet clear by mid-2025.

That said, during the months-long run-up to Namibia's 2024 elections, Namibian social media and social messaging platform users were continuously exposed to politics and election-related digital mis- and disinformation.

Against this backdrop, this report spotlights some of what Namibians were exposed to in 2024, ahead of, around and after the 27 November elections day, and offers realistic recommendations to counter election-related digital mis- and disinformation around future elections.

1. Institute for Public Policy Research. Tracking Disinformation: Social Media and Namibia's 2019 Elections. 2020. https://ippr.org.na/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Tracking-Disinformation-web.pdf
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3. Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa. Disinformation Pathways and Effects: Case Studies from Five African Countries. 2022. https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/briefs/Disinformation_Pathways_and_Effects_Case_Studies_from_Five_African_Countries_Report.pdf
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3. Countering #Elections2024 Mis- & Disinformation

3.1 Political abuse of social media and the 2024 elections

Social media has become important for political communication and messaging, especially during electoral periods. However, often political actors (politicians and parties) use social media to engage in negative campaigning, by employing smears and spreading fake news or to intimidate and incite. This section looks at how Namibian political actors, including politically connected or associated interests or entities, used social media in the run-up to, during and after the 27 November 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections.

How did political campaigns use social media?

Most Namibian political parties, politicians and associated political actors still appear quite unfamiliar with how social media can be used to aid them in their messaging and communication around elections. This is evident from their use, or lack thereof, of social media platforms to communicate and engage with supporters and voters.

Most Namibian political parties and politicians, even quite prominent ones, don't have very high profile social media pages or profiles, with the exception of a few. And even those who do have huge followings and high engagement on social media do not necessarily use these to spotlight their policy proposals and commitments to voters, but rather to attack their opponents or to react to attacks from opponents. Politically partisan or associated social media pages and profiles were also posting and spreading political and election-related propaganda and mis- and disinformation via various platforms.

There was very little actual engagement with the political and socio-economic agendas and programmes, as captured in election manifestos, evident in how political parties, politicians, and those associated with such parties and candidates used their social media accounts.

The political parties, those with functioning social media pages or profiles, mainly also used these to post and spread photos and short videoclips of campaign rallies and graphics of party slogans.

While a lot of election-related discussion, debate, propagandising and mis- and disinforming was happening via open online platforms, such as Facebook or X (Twitter), indications are that it was especially or primarily in WhatsApp spaces and groups where election-related political discussion and information sharing, including the posting of mis- and disinformation content, was taking place.

Namibian political parties, including the ruling Swapo Party, do not have large presences or followings on social media. This screenshot image taken before the November 2024 elections shows that at the time the Swapo Party, the largest and most popular political party, had less than 4,000 followers on X (Twitter). Some other political parties did not even have official social media pages or accounts, or even websites.

What sort of abuse of social media did we see from political actors?

As stated, it was only some politicians who overtly used their online and social media profiles and pages to directly attack opposing parties or political opponents. It was rather partisan actors or profiles that appeared to favour or support specific political causes or agendas, as clearly illustrated by the obvious slanting or bias of the information they posted or shared, that were disseminating divisive social media content.

Information manipulation tactics and methods were used by a variety of clearly partisan actors online to push or promote election or politics related mis- and disinformation. The most visible information manipulation campaigns clearly stemmed from among and were supported by ruling Swapo Party allied actors and, on the other side, Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) allied actors or interests.

The most visible or prominent tactics used in these election-related information manipulation campaigns were:

- Narrative laundering;
- Smear campaigns; and
- Political propaganda.

This project focused on monitoring the use or deployment of the first two tactics by the various actors concerned.

The primary methods or ways in which these tactics were deployed were:

- Use of **fake or manipulated images or voice messages** and / or **misleading videos or graphics** across social media and messaging platforms;
- **Narrative laundering via traditional and social media** pages or channels;
- **Mimicking news media**;
- The **use of foreign influencers** and / or disseminating of **mis- and disinformation via foreign channels;**
- The **use of artificial intelligence (AI)** tools to generate social media content;
- **Trolling or swarming** on social media.

Aside from these, it should be noted that **media mistakes and bad reporting also significantly contributed to polluting the electoral information landscape** in the run-up to and beyond the 27 November 2024 elections.

Screenshot of an AI generated video-clip that was aimed at discouraging people to vote for Panduleni Itula and the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC). The video-clip started circulating online and in WhatsApp spaces in early 2024. The video-clip was used in a smear campaign targeting Itula, accusing him of being a British agent.

What is information manipulation?

Information manipulation has numerous similar definitions.

In short, information manipulation can be said to be **the coordinated and sustained production, distribution and / or promotion of messaging or information that is false, misleading, propagandised or harmful in order to influence sentiment or perception of an individual, organisation or entity.** Information manipulation campaigns use traditional and / or social media platforms to spread such false, misleading, propagandised or harmful messaging or information.

It is worth emphasising the last point, that information manipulation involves **the deliberate weaponisation of media** in order to engage in an influence campaign.

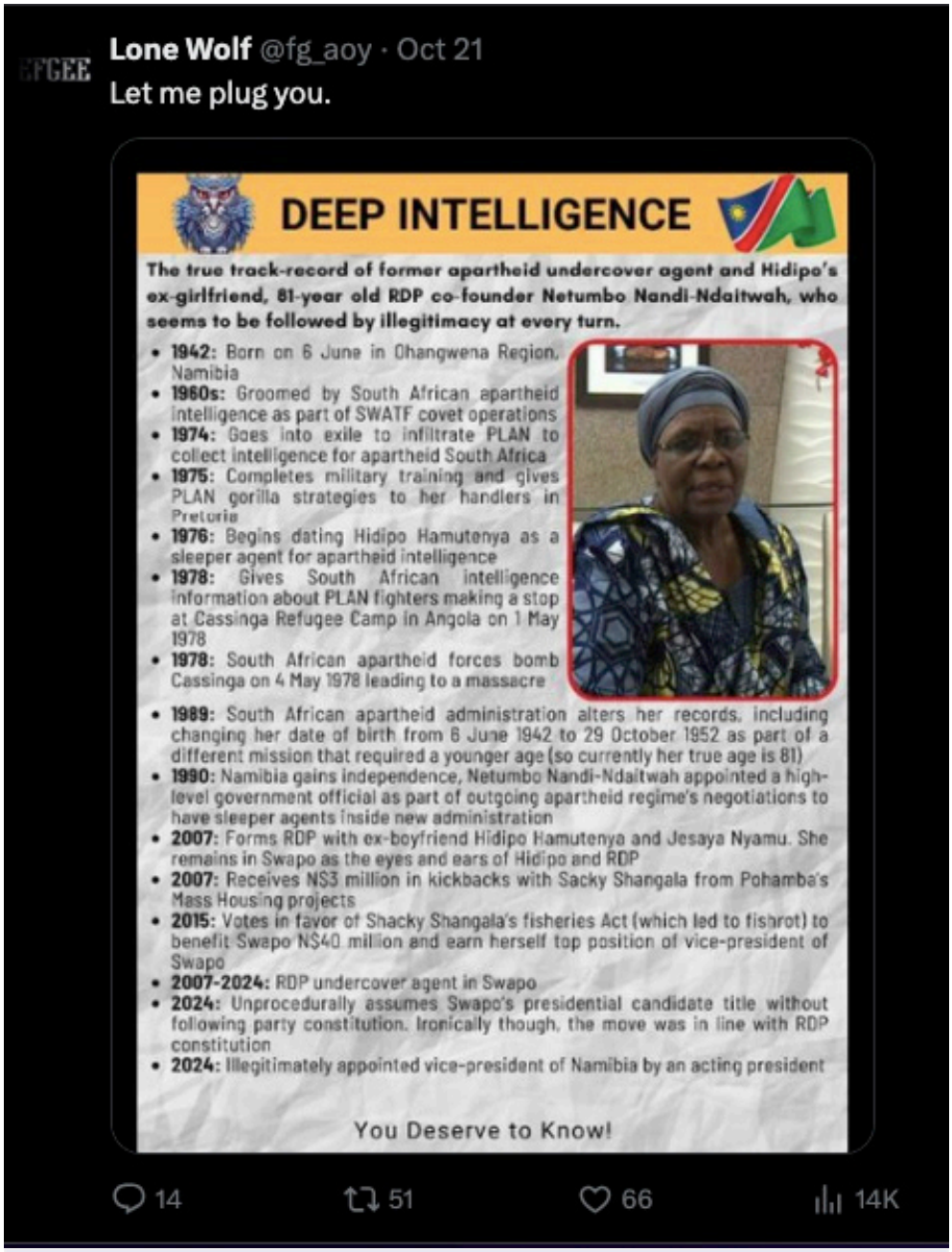
What is narrative laundering?

Narrative laundering is a **disinformation technique** used to make false or misleading information appear credible and widely accepted. It works by strategically spreading a narrative through multiple sources until it gains legitimacy. Here's how it typically unfolds:

1. Placement – The false or misleading information is first introduced, often through obscure or unreliable sources.
2. Layering – The narrative is then amplified by multiple accounts, websites, or influencers, making it seem more widespread.
3. Integration – Eventually, the narrative is picked up by more credible sources or mainstream platforms, giving it an appearance of legitimacy.

This technique is commonly used in **political propaganda, conspiracy theories, and misinformation campaigns** to manipulate public perception. It exploits psychological biases, such as the tendency to believe repeated information, even if it's false.

Narrative laundering works by **weaving layers of lies around truths**. The aim of those engaging in narrative laundering is **to sow confusion and to undermine trust in targeted political candidates or parties.**



'Deep Intelligence' gained prominence in the months ahead of the November 2024 elections and primarily targeted the Swapo Party with a narrative of corruption and its candidate for the presidential election, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, with narratives of being a foreign puppet and a traitor to her party. Various accounts, such as the one above, regularly spread the 'Deep Intelligence' disinformation.

Which actors did we see abuse social media?

It was clear that **actors associated** with or supporting various political parties or causes were behind much of the election-related mis- and disinformation that was circulating across social media and messaging platforms before, during and after the 27 November 2024 elections. These actors fell into the following categories:

- Partisan social media accounts;
- Partisan social media influencers;
- Politically-affiliated actors in social media and closed messaging groups;
- Politicians and politically affiliated individuals;
- Foreign partisan social media accounts and influencers;
- Foreign actors (ab)using traditional media (online).

An X (Twitter) account going by the handle @ali_naka regularly posted content in support of the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) ahead of and after the November 2024 elections. Ali Naka was the most prominent of foreign social media influencer accounts that posted politically partisan content.

Which platforms / media were favoured by disinformation actors?

Election-related mis- and disinformation were **primarily spread and visible via social media platforms**, but also circulated in closed messaging groups, such as WhatsApp groups. TikTok also became a platform that was used to spread lies and propaganda. Some of the election-related mis- and disinformation made it into traditional media reporting or was spread via more traditional (if partisan) media platforms, whether online or offline.

According to what *Namibia Fact Check* observed, **much of the mis- and disinformation was spreading in WhatsApp spaces, such as politics discussion groups or political party supporter groups.** While it's impossible to categorically state that WhatsApp was the main channel for mis- and disinformation, indications are that that was indeed the case, as **WhatsApp is the most widely used and prevalent social media or messaging platform** in use in Namibia.

The most popular platforms / media for spreading election-related mis- and disinformation were:

- WhatsApp;
- Facebook;
- X (Twitter);
- TikTok.

3.2 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

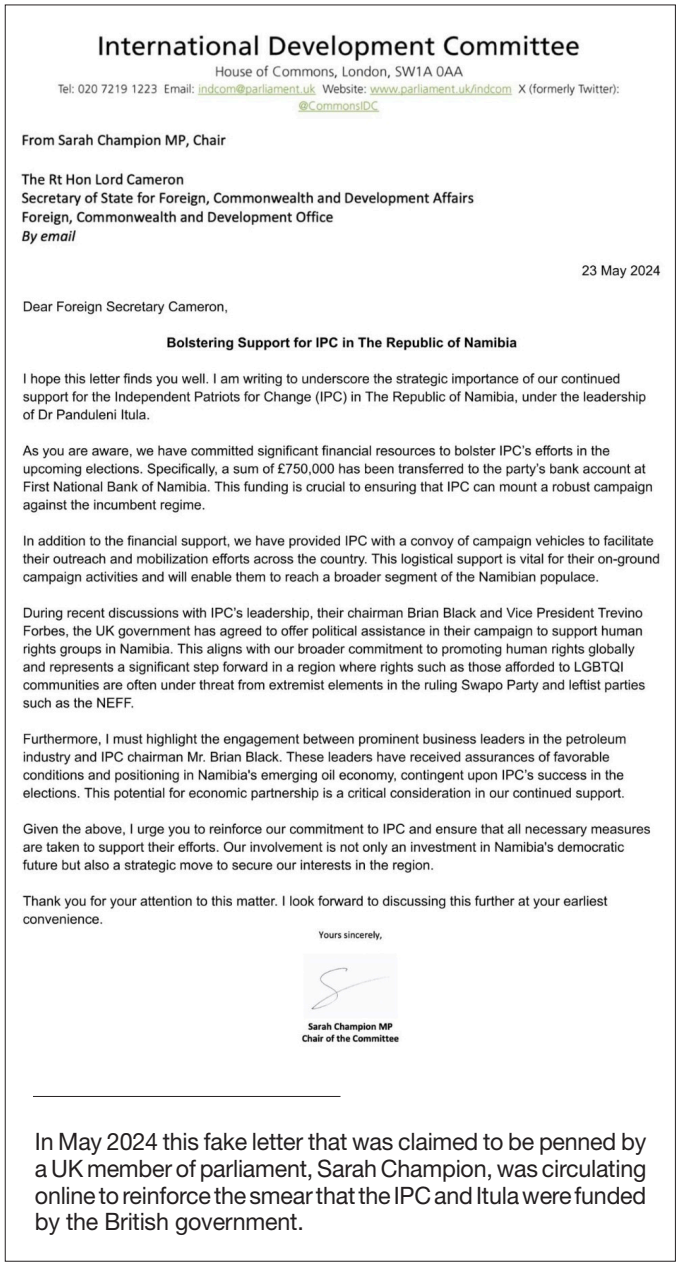
While there were a number of smear campaigns active on the electoral information landscape before and around the 27 November 2024 elections, the consistent and sustained attacks on the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) and its leader, Panduleni Itula, were arguably the most visible. Also quite visible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

Screenshot of a 'cheap-fake' AI-generated video that started circulating online and that painted Panduleni Itula as an "opportunist and con artist politician", a British citizen, and even an apartheid regime agent.



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 LGBTQI 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.

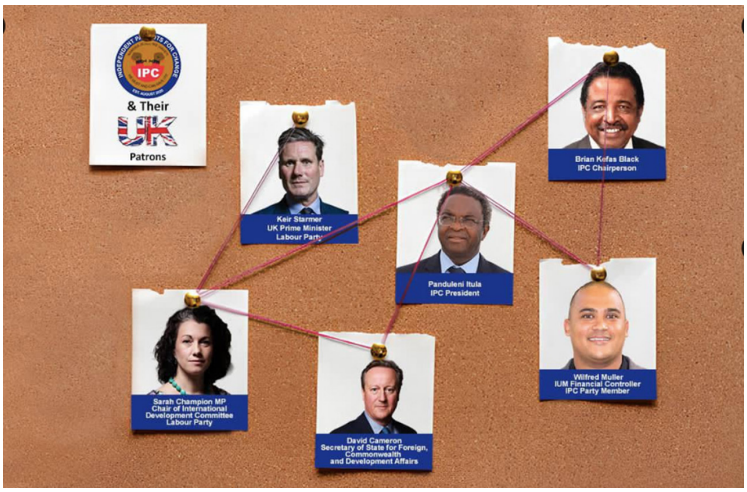
Given the above, I urge you to reinforce our commitment to IPC and ensure that all necessary measures are taken to support their efforts. Our involvement is not only an investment in Namibia's democratic future but also a strategic move to secure our interests in the region.

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.

Call on: +263 242 703631 Open : 24 Hours feedback@zrp.gov.zw

ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE

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PRESS STATEMENT : 8TH JULY 2024 – ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE DETAIN OVER 50 NAMIBIAN CITIZENS AT BOTSWANA BORDER

During patrols near the Botswana border, the **Zimbabwe Republic Police** discovered a training camp with more than 50 Namibian citizens illegally in Zimbabwe.

Interrogations revealed they crossed the border for military training ordered by their boss **Elvis Lizazi. The camp contained 40 AK-47 rifles, over 50 grenades, and smoke bombs.** The **Zimbabwe Republic Police** has engaged the Judicial Service Commission for all suspects arrested to appear in court in batches. In this regard, no deposit fines will be accepted at Police Stations.

The Namibian ambassador has been notified, and joint efforts are underway to enhance border security.

The **Zimbabwe Republic Police** urges the public to report anyone engaged in touting activities at any nearest Police Station or National Complaints Desk on **(0242) 703631** or WhatsApp on **0712 800 197.**

(NYATHI. P) Commissioner

Chief Staff Officer **(Press and Public Relations)**

to the **Commissioner-General of Police**

Police General Headquarters

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.

DEEP INTELLIGENCE

SWAPO received US$100 million from USAID to ignore Jerry Ekandjo's anti-gay bill and give away land in Eros

- Deep Intelligence has information which shows that soon after its controversial 2022 congress, SWAPO was paid US$100 million by the CIA through USAID to advance the LGBTQ and gay agenda in Namibia, as well as give away land in Eros, Windhoek, to build the biggest American Embassy in Africa in preparation for the discovered oil.
- When Jerry Ekandjo introduced the marriage bill in parliament, he and other Swapo MPs were warned not to support the bill because the top four of Swapo had already gotten paid by the Americans.
- When the bill was passed by parliament, the president was obligated by law to sign it, but it's been lying on the president's desk catching dust to this day.
- When Nangolo Mbumba became interim president, both him and vice-president Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah were paid US$2 million each to ignore the marriage bill passed by parliament and advance the LGBTQ agenda in Namibia.
- Netumbo is well-known in Swapo circles as a CIA asset, along with Monika Geingos and Emma Theofelus, and the three are advancing gay rights with the Americans.

You Deserve to Know!

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

DEEP INTELLIGENCE

The true track-record of former apartheid undercover agent and Hidipo's ex-girlfriend, 81-year old RDP co-founder Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, who seems to be followed by illegitimacy at every turn.

- **1942:** Born on 6 June in Ohangwena Region, Namibia
- **1960s:** Groomed by South African apartheid intelligence as part of SWATF covet operations
- **1974:** Goes into exile to infiltrate PLAN to collect intelligence for apartheid South Africa
- **1975:** Completes military training and gives PLAN gorilla strategies to her handlers in Pretoria
- **1976:** Begins dating Hidipo Hamutenya as a sleeper agent for apartheid intelligence
- **1978:** Gives South African intelligence information about PLAN fighters making a stop at Cassinga Refugee Camp in Angola on 1 May 1978
- **1978:** South African apartheid forces bomb Cassinga on 4 May 1978 leading to a massacre
- **1989:** South African apartheid administration alters her records, including changing her date of birth from 6 June 1942 to 29 October 1952 as part of a different mission that required a younger age (so currently her true age is 81)
- **1990:** Namibia gains independence, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah appointed a high-level government official as part of outgoing apartheid regime's negotiations to have sleeper agents inside new administration
- **2007:** Forms RDP with ex-boyfriend Hidipo Hamutenya and Jesaya Nyamu. She remains in Swapo as the eyes and ears of Hidipo and RDP
- **2007:** Receives N$3 million in kickbacks with Sacky Shangala from Pohamba's Mass Housing projects
- **2015:** Votes in favor of Shacky Shangala's fisheries Act (which led to fishrot) to benefit Swapo N$40 million and earn herself top position of vice-president of Swapo
- **2007-2024:** RDP undercover agent in Swapo
- **2024:** Unprocedurally assumes Swapo's presidential candidate title without following party constitution. Ironically though, the move was in line with RDP constitution
- **2024:** Illegitimately appointed vice-president of Namibia by an acting president

You Deserve to Know!

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.

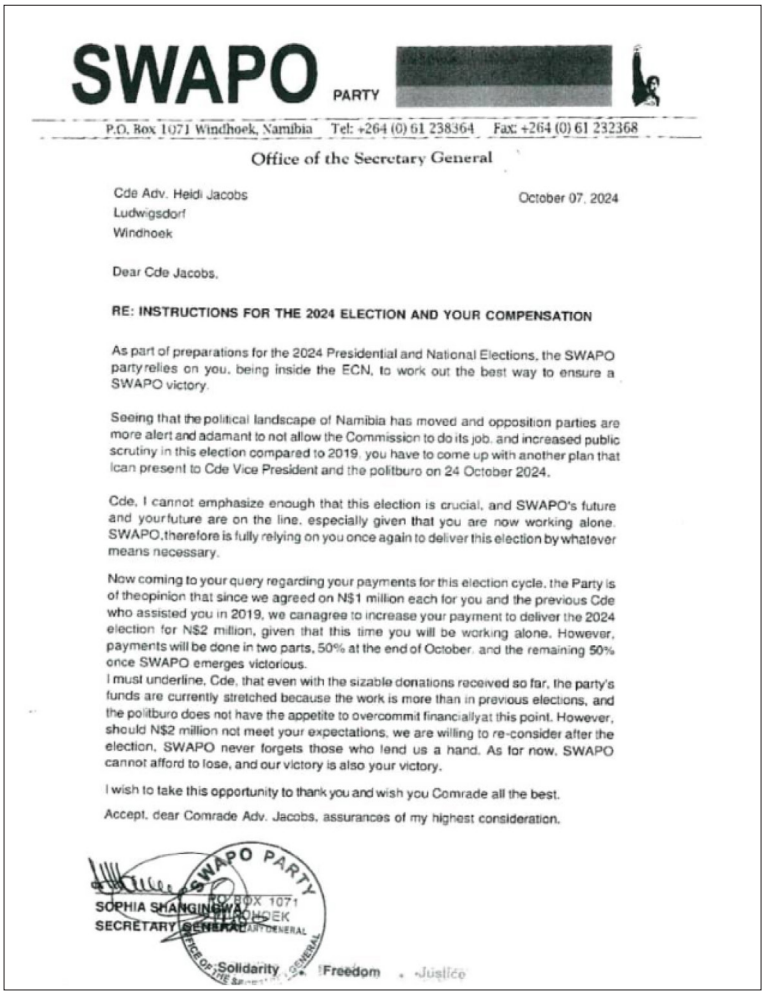
Screenshot of an AI-generated 'cheap-fake' video that supposedly showed the 'collapse' of Nandi-Ndaitwah at a party rally at Otjiwarongo, Otjozondjupa Region, at the end of October 2024. This video, that circulated online and in WhatsApp spaces through November 2024, emerged almost immediately after 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.



SWAPO PARTY [redacted]

P.O. Box 1071 Windhoek, Namibia Tel: +264 (0) 61 238364 Fax: +264 (0) 61 232368

Office of the Secretary General

Cde Adv. Heidi Jacobs
Ludwigsdorf
Windhoek

October 07, 2024

Dear Cde Jacobs,

RE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE 2024 ELECTION AND YOUR COMPENSATION

As part of preparations for the 2024 Presidential and National Elections, the SWAPO party relies on you, being inside the ECN, to work out the best way to ensure a SWAPO victory.

Seeing that the political landscape of Namibia has moved and opposition parties are more alert and adamant to not allow the Commission to do its job, and increased public scrutiny in this election compared to 2019, you have to come up with another plan that I can present to Cde Vice President and the politburo on 24 October 2024.

Cde, I cannot emphasize enough that this election is crucial, and SWAPO's future and your future are on the line, especially given that you are now working alone. SWAPO, therefore is fully relying on you once again to deliver this election by whatever means necessary.

Now coming to your query regarding your payments for this election cycle, the Party is of the opinion that since we agreed on N$1 million each for you and the previous Cde who assisted you in 2019, we can agree to increase your payment to deliver the 2024 election for N$2 million, given that this time you will be working alone. However, payments will be done in two parts, 50% at the end of October, and the remaining 50% once SWAPO emerges victorious.

I must underline, Cde, that even with the sizable donations received so far, the party's funds are currently stretched because the work is more than in previous elections, and the politburo does not have the appetite to overcommit financially at this point. However, should N$2 million not meet your expectations, we are willing to re-consider after the election. SWAPO never forgets those who lend us a hand. As for now, SWAPO cannot afford to lose, and our victory is also your victory.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you and wish you Comrade all the best.

Accept, dear Comrade Adv. Jacobs, assurances of my highest consideration.

SOPHIA SHANGINGWA
SECRETARY GENERAL

SWAPO PARTY P.O. BOX 1071 WINDHOEK

Solidarity • Freedom • Justice

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.

3.3 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".

Truth. For its own sake

09 DAYS LEFT

Electoral Commission of Namibia

Mbumba assesses food production Page 3

NEWS

Infrastructure investments key to beneficiation ambition Page 9

BUSINESS

Swapo promises

N$85bn for job-creation

… intends creating 5 000 jobs in five years

Victoria Immanuel

SWAPO Party vice president and presidential candidate Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah says the party will channel N$85 billion towards job-creation and tackle youth unemployment in the country over a period of five years, once it retains power. "Comrades, we are going to create jobs… Youth unemployment remains a real challenge. The high rate of youth unemployment is a concern, not just for the affected individuals, but for the entire nation as well," said Nandi-Ndaitwah, who is also referred to as NNN in political corridors.

Speaking at the party's star rally held on Saturday in Eenhana in the Ohangwena region, the politician told her audience that job-creation will be one of the key priority areas for the party.

SWAPO on page 2

NAMIBIA DECIDES 2024

Itula warns against smear campaigns

Eveline de Klerk

WALVIS BAY - Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) leader Panduleni Itula has warned Namibians to brace for an onslaught of smear campaigns and propaganda as the country approaches the much-anticipated elections next Wednesday.

Itula, who is adamant that he will be sworn

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.

NEW ERA

Truth. For its own sake.

Wednesday 20 November 2024

07 DAYS LEFT

YOUTH CORNER | PAGE 09

KUNDANA | PAGE 13&14

SPORT

British high commissioner 'courts controversy'

… attends IPC-linked mayoral gala

Evelline de Klerk

Trevino Forbes

Charles Moore

Parties decry 'dirty' campaigns

Lahja Nashuuta

Election fever 'climaxes'

Loide Jason

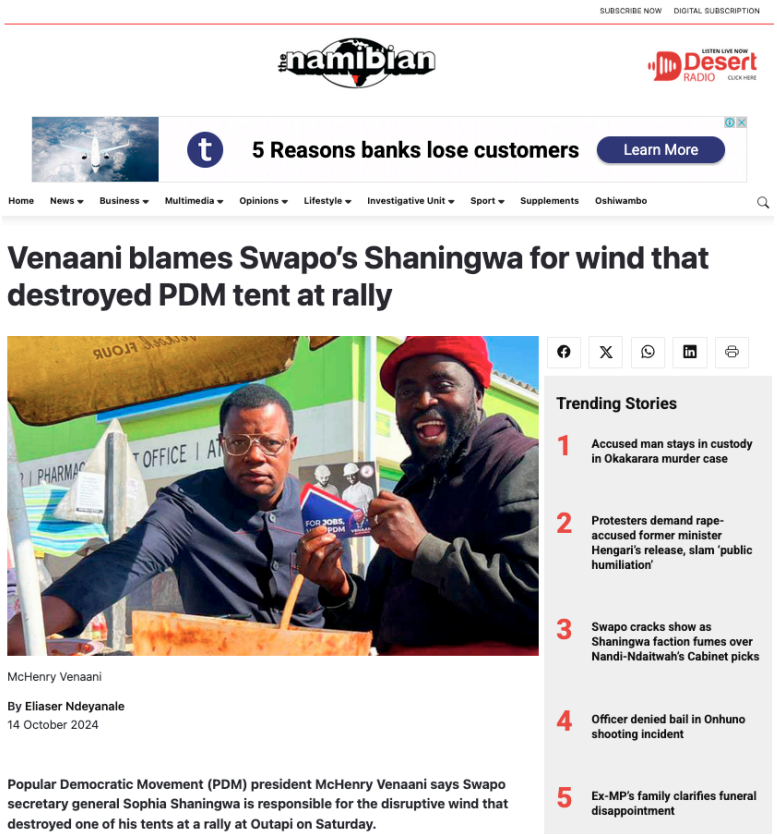
NAMIBIA VOTES 2024

Scan the QR code to access the polling stations

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.

3. Lack of Context Distorts Reality

Poor reporting often omits crucial context, making stories misleading. For instance, in October 2024, *The Namibian* reported that Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) leader McHenry Venaani had blamed the Swapo Party secretary general, Sophia Shaningwa, for the wind blowing over a tent at the party's rally at Outapi, Omusati Region. The report failed to make it clear that Venaani's remark was said as a joke, but rather presented it as a serious-toned accusation. Without proper framing, misinformation thrives.



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the namibian

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Venaani blames Swapo's Shaningwa for wind that destroyed PDM tent at rally

McHenry Venaani

By Eliaser Ndeyanale
14 October 2024

Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) president McHenry Venaani says Swapo secretary general Sophia Shaningwa is responsible for the disruptive wind that destroyed one of his tents at a rally at Outapi on Saturday.

Trending Stories

1 Accused man stays in custody in Okakarara murder case

2 Protesters demand rape-accused former minister Hengari's release, slam 'public humiliation'

3 Swapo cracks show as Shaningwa faction fumes over Nandi-Ndaitwah's Cabinet picks

4 Officer denied bail in Onhuno shooting incident

5 Ex-MP's family clarifies funeral disappointment

This article published by The Namibian portrayed statements made by PDM leader McHenry Venaani as serious when he was actually joking, presenting his statements in a misleading light.

4. Weak Fact-Checking Enables Disinformation

When media outlets fail to fact-check claims before publishing, they risk spreading falsehoods. *Namibia Fact Check* has documented cases where news media fumbled basic reporting, allowing misinformation about political party platforms to circulate. For example, in November 2024 most news media reported on statements about job creation made by the Swapo Party's presidential candidate, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, during various campaign stops. The media simply reported what Nandi-Ndaitwah said without verifying her statements against commitments listed in the party's election manifesto, which differed from the candidate's statements. Basic fact checking would have revealed that Nandi-Ndaitwah was stating a figure which did not appear in the party's manifesto.

Prominent news media got it wrong when they simply reported what a presidential candidate said about her party's job creation intentions, instead of verifying her statements with what was actually in the party's election manifesto.

Inside mystery of 'Alaska

NEW ERA

Truth. For its own sake.

09 DAYS LEFT

Swapo promises N$85bn for job-creation

PDM only party to transform Namibia - Venaani

Itula warns against smear campaigns

Swapo promises 500 000 jobs in 5 years

Nampa denies political interference

Misinformation could influence voters

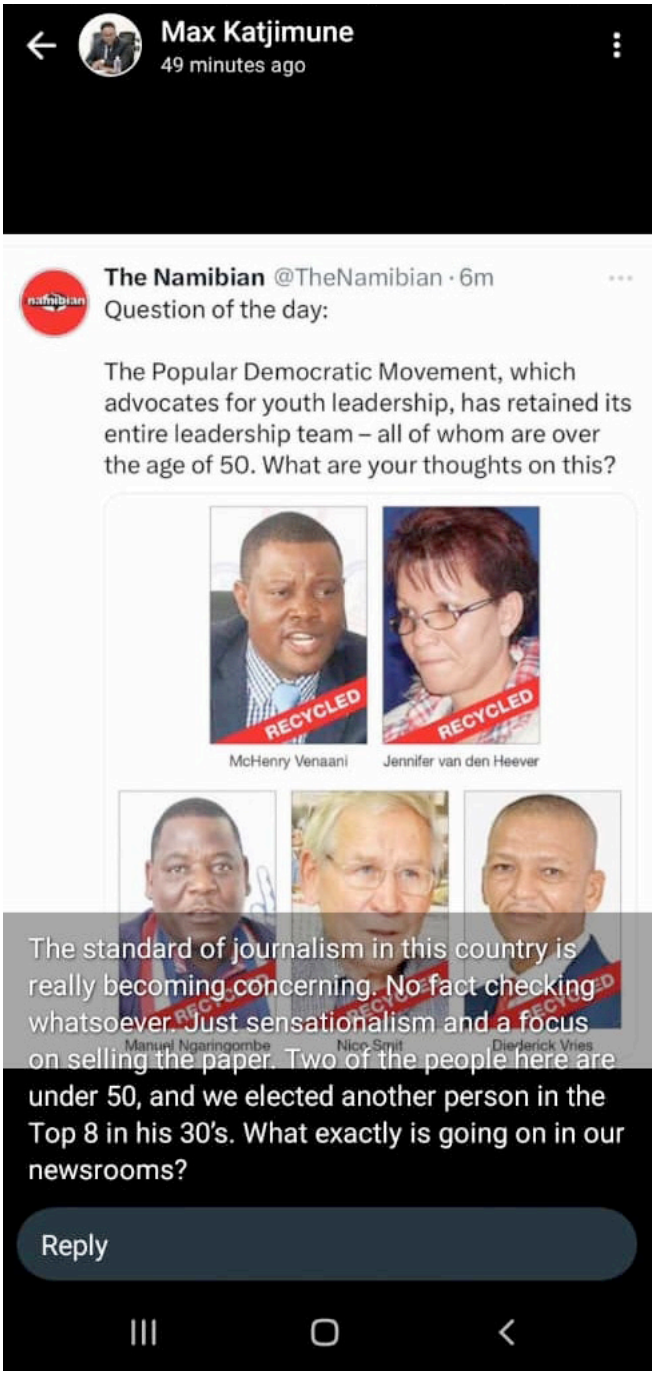
Reduce Electricity Costs with Solar Energy

Standard Bank Business & Commercial

For more on this, read *Namibia Fact Check's report.*

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 Namibia*n 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=_91u0PWEra0>

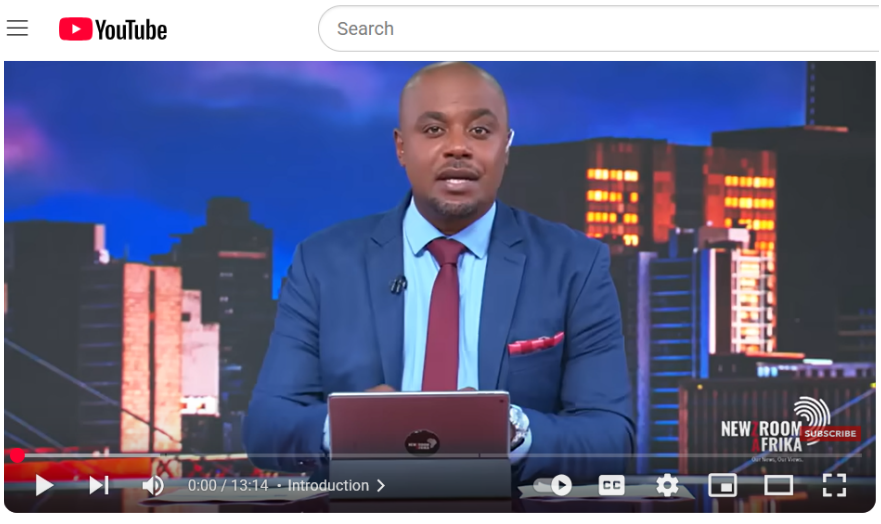
In the lead-up to the 27 November general election in Namibia, polls indicate that Swapo, which has triumphed in all elections since Namibia's independence in 1990, might face defeat for the first time. Nordic Africa Institute analyst and senior advisor Prof. Henning Melber discusses expectations on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

From <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_91u0PWEra0>

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.*



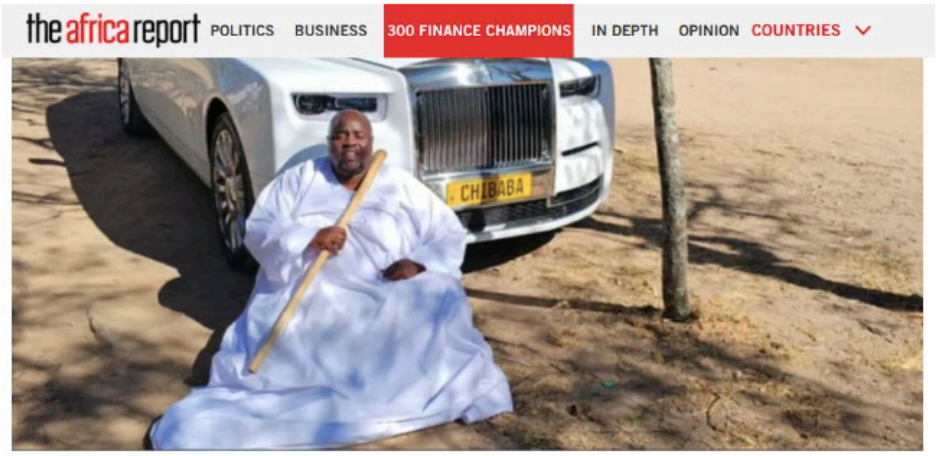
November polls to test Swapo's electoral fortunes

Newzroom Afrika
568K subscribers
Subscribe
448
Share

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.

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).

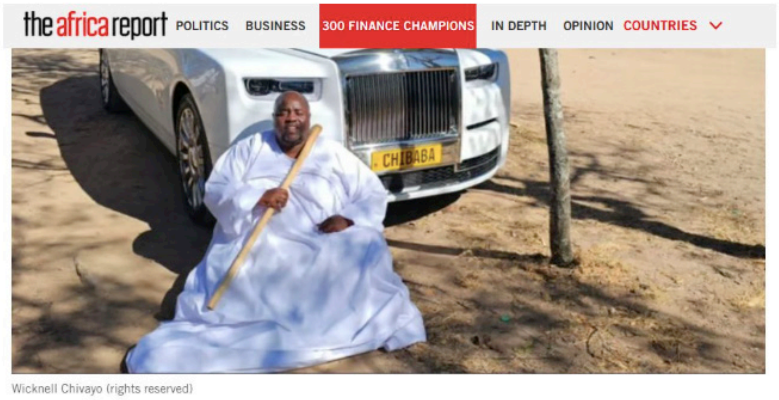
ZimCelebs' headline repeated the false "US$60 million" claim.

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.



Wicknell Chivayo (rights reserved)

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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.

Middle East & Africa 45

Africa votes (2)

SWAPO hangs on

A tired old liberation party stays in power

LINES STRETCHED around the block, motionless, as voters stood for hours in the searing heat of a Namibian summer, waiting for ballot papers. On November 27th, long after voting had begun in the country's presidential and parliamentary elections, over a third still lacked election materials. Thousands went home without casting their vote. Then the electoral commission announced it would extend voting in some polling stations for three more days. Voters returned, multiple times. "It's like you are a mad person," one frustrated citizen told local media.

Finally, six days later, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, known as NNN, was declared president, with 58% of the vote. As leader of SWAPO, the party that has ruled Namibia since independence in 1990, she held off a challenge by Panduleni Itula, a 67-year-old dentist, lawyer and former SWAPO youth campaigner, who spent 33 years in Britain before coming back home in 2013. With 15 candidates competing, he got 26% of the vote as head of the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC).

In February this year, President Hage Geingob, a SWAPO stalwart, died in office. He was replaced by an interim president, who then handed the presidential candidacy to the 72-year-old NNN, Namibia's vice-president. Educated in the Soviet Union and Britain, she is married to a former head of Namibia's armed forces. She will be Namibia's first female head of state.

Her victory, however, has been sorely marred by the failings of the electoral commission. The IPC called the voting extension illegal and criticised it for reopening only some polling stations, without explaining how they were selected. There were reports that SWAPO had been bringing its supporters by bus to the polling stations that had reopened. The IPC is refusing to recognise the results and says it will "pursue justice through the courts". On December 3rd, when the result was declared, opposition parties led by the IPC boycotted the announcement.

As results stand, Ms Nandi-Ndaitwah faces an uphill task. SWAPO lost 12 seats in the parliament, putting it well below the two-thirds-threshold needed to pass legislation. So she will have to cosy up to opposition parties, themselves a fractured group. In the previous two general elections SWAPO's tally had already dropped from 87% to 65%. This time it got just 53%.

Namibians are frustrated by falling living standards and rising corruption. Many of the country's 3m-odd people are short of basic housing. Two-thirds of urbanites live in shanty towns. Unemployment is stubbornly high. From next year the daily minimum wage for farm workers will be ten Namibian dollars (55 American cents).

The SWAPO government has been increasingly blamed for the poverty. Namibia is the second-most unequal country in the world, just ahead of neighbouring South Africa, according to World Bank numbers from 2022. Of the 1.4m Namibians registered to vote, more than half were born after independence, so many felt no residual gratitude to SWAPO for winning it from South Africa. In the run-up to the elections an air of expectation was heightened by the defeat or decline of time-worn ruling parties in neighbouring Botswana and South Africa that were deemed to have succumbed to corruption over too many years in office.

SWAPO has likewise been dogged by allegations of corruption. The so-called Fishrot scandal, which was exposed in 2019 and is still dragging on, brought a clutch of SWAPO ministers to court and prison, revealing a web of bribery and chicanery in the fishing industry, a big chunk of Namibia's economy. According to Afrobarometer, a continental pollster, two-thirds of Namibians believe corruption has risen in the past year. New oil finds and plans to harness Namibia's wind and solar energy to create green hydrogen have yet to benefit ordinary Namibians. Oil reserves being tapped by TotalEnergies and Shell are not expected to begin flowing until 2030.

So it is surprising, to say the least, that Ms Nandi-Ndaitwah beat the dentist by so wide a margin. In any event, she will start her presidency under a cloud of doubt and has a hard task ahead. ■

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.

3.4 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?

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.

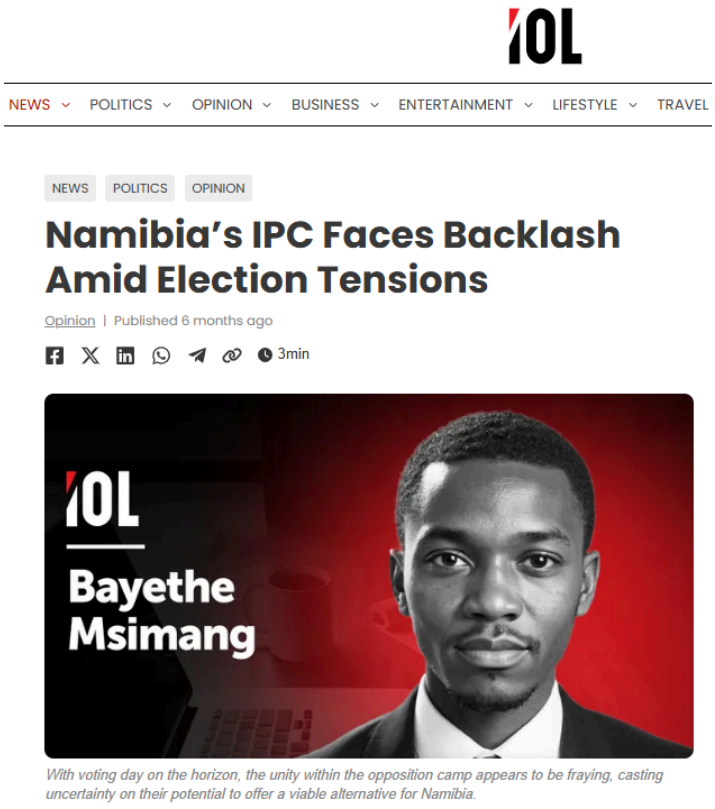
While some forms of foreign influence, like cultural exchanges or diplomatic engagement, are legitimate, malign influence campaigns aim to undermine democratic processes, sow division, or advance strategic interests through deceptive means.

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 section, 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.


IOL

NEWS POLITICS OPINION BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLE TRAVEL

NEWS POLITICS OPINION

Namibia's IPC Faces Backlash Amid Election Tensions

Opinion | Published 6 months ago

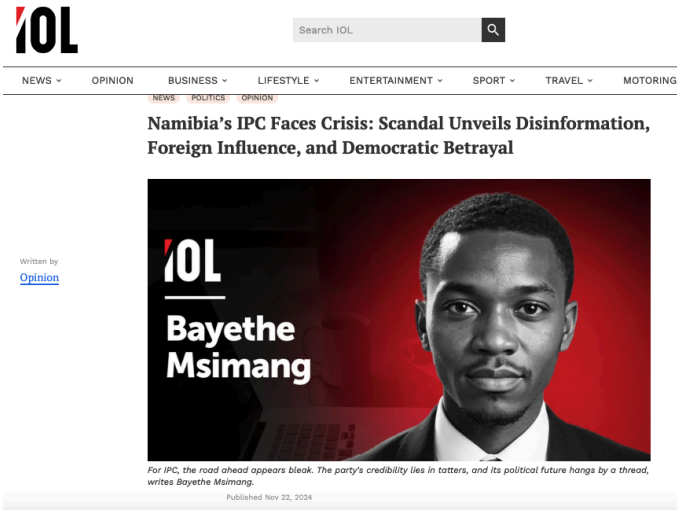
3min

IOL

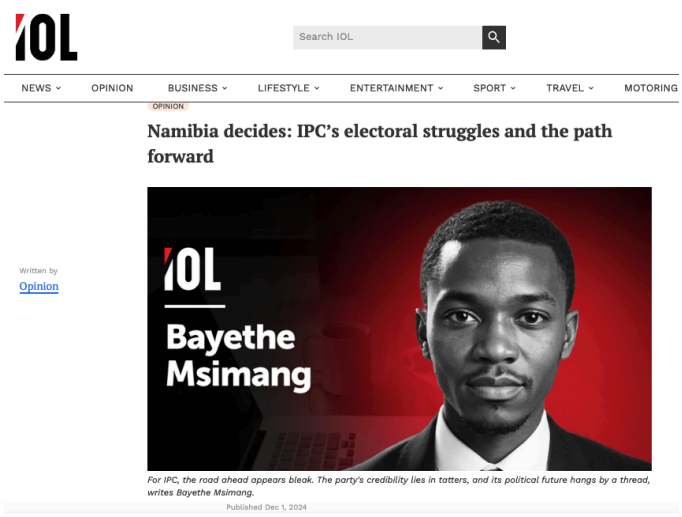
Bayethe Msimang

With voting day on the horizon, the unity within the opposition camp appears to be fraying, casting uncertainty on their potential to offer a viable alternative for Namibia.

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.

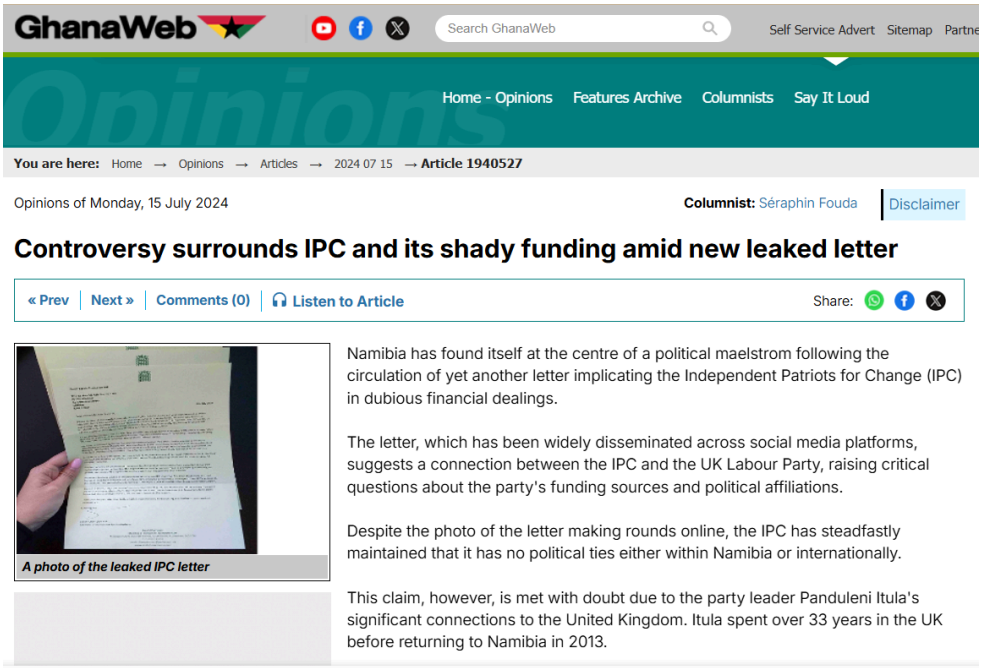
CONTROVERSY SURROUNDS IPC AND ITS FUNDING AMID NEW LEAKED LETTER

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.



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.

For more on this, read the *Namibia Fact Check report* on this.

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.

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.

3.5 AI and the 2024 elections

Election-related mis- and disinformation content took many forms on social media and messaging platforms ahead of and around the presidential and parliamentary elections of November 2024. AI-generated content formed an important part of disinformation campaigns in these spaces throughout the year

How are AI tools used to spread mis- and disinformation?

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools can be used to spread mis- and disinformation in several ways:

- **Fakes and synthetic media**: AI-generated videos, images, and audio can create realistic but false representations of events or individuals, making it difficult to distinguish truth from fabrication.
- **Automated disinformation campaigns**: AI can be used to generate misleading articles, social media posts, and comments at scale, amplifying false narratives and manipulating public opinion.
- **Targeted manipulation**: AI-driven algorithms can personalise disinformation for specific audiences, exploiting biases and reinforcing misinformation.
- **AI-powered bots**: Automated accounts can flood online spaces with misleading content, making false claims appear more credible through repetition.

However, AI is also being used to **combat** misinformation by detecting patterns, analysing language, and moderating content. For instance, *Namibia Fact Check* partnered with British fact checking service Full Fact to use their Full Fact AI tool to identify and monitor elections-related mis- and disinformation across various social media platforms.

The challenge lies in balancing AI's potential for both harm and protection.

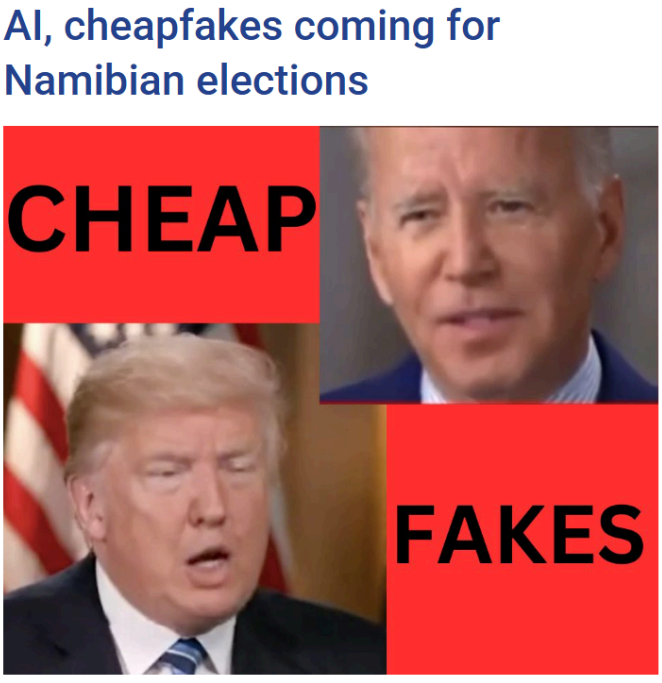
The following are examples of elections-related AI-generated content that circulated in social media and messaging platform spaces throughout 2024.

> "Elections and generative AI have a special connection. This is because the actors involved in elections always pursue specific goals: to either win power for their allies or themselves or to influence a foreign country's political landscape. GAI enables such actors to create "unreality," and it's becoming a weapon in information warfare and influence operations. Such campaigns are mostly coordinated, concerted, evaluated, measured and funded by political or foreign actors."
>
> *- Generative AI is the ultimate disinformation amplifier*

Politics and elections related AI-generated content

AI-generated election-related content started circulating in social media and messaging platform spaces in early 2024. The Namibian electoral information landscape was lucky in that deepfake disinformation content was not an issue this time, but cheapfake AI-generated content nevertheless made prominent appearances throughout the year. This clearly shows that disinformation actors were experimenting with AI tools to produce information manipulation and social media content. This suggests that deepfake-type content could become a serious issue in Namibian political and electoral information spaces down the line.

Namibia Fact Check had already cautioned about the spectre of AI-generated content on the electoral information landscape in early May 2024 following the viral circulation of two AI cheapfake video clips in Namibian WhatsApp and other social media spaces in April 2024.



Screenshot of the headline and article image of a *Namibia Fact Check article* from 3 May 2024 cautioning about the emergence of AI-generated content on the Namibian political information landscape.

Deepfakes vs Cheapfakes

Deepfakes and cheapfakes are both forms of manipulated media, but they differ in how they are created:

- **Deepfakes**: These are generated using AI and machine learning techniques to create highly realistic fake videos, images, or audio. Deepfake technology can swap faces, mimic voices, and fabricate events that never happened. They require sophisticated algorithms and computing power to produce convincing results.
- **Cheapfakes**: These are manipulated using simpler, low-tech tools and methods like basic video editing, speeding up or slowing down footage, or cropping and recontextualizing clips. Unlike deepfakes, cheapfakes don't rely on AI. For example, a video of a politician might be slowed down to make them appear drunk or confused.

Both types of fakes can be used for misinformation, but deepfakes tend to be more advanced and harder to detect.

This information was generated with a prompt using Microsoft's Copilot.

What we saw?

In April 2024, a cheapfake video clip, generated using a free online image and voice generating AI tool, of former US president Joe Biden circulated virally in Namibian WhatsApp spaces, especially. The AI tool allows users to generate short videos of a US celebrity saying something that the user prompts. In this instance, US president Biden was commenting on the then recent oil finds off the Namibian coast and expressing support for the ruling Swapo Party and its then presidential election candidate, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah

Screenshot of the AI-generated video clip in which a voice generator mimicking former US president Joe Biden was prompted to express support for the ruling Swapo Party and its presidential election candidate.

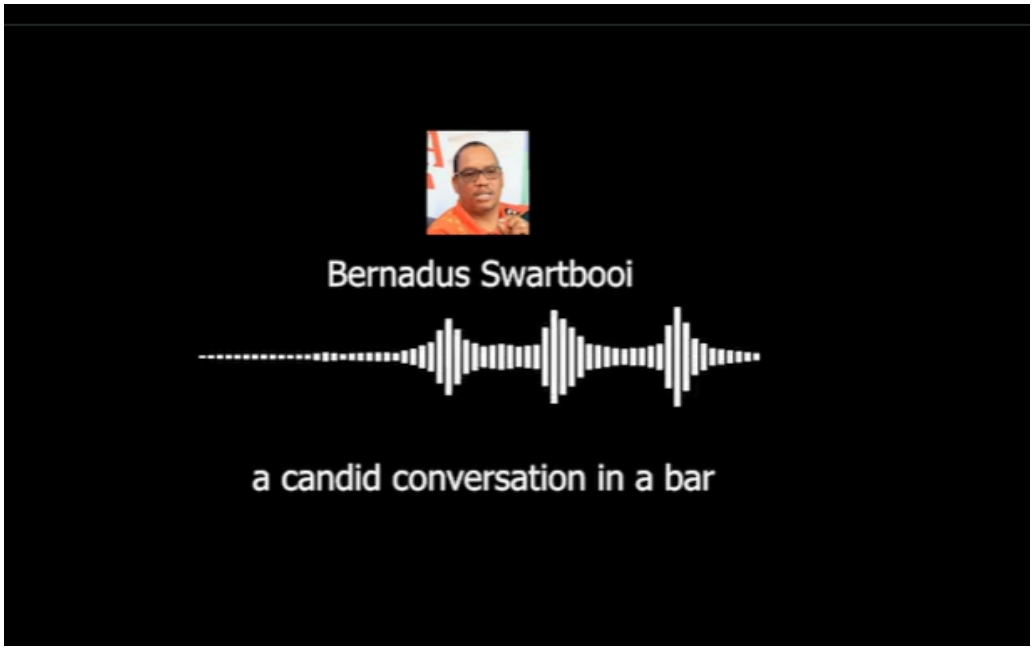
In May 2024 more elections-related AI-generated video clips started circulating online and in social messaging spaces. *Namibia Fact Check* commented on some of these videos in an article published in early July 2024.

Screenshot of an AI-generated video that circulated in WhatsApp and other social media spaces since May 2024. The short video encouraged viewers to vote for the ruling Swapo Party, while repeating factual inaccuracies.

Screenshot of another AI-generated short video that circulated in social media spaces since May 2024 encouraging viewers not to vote for the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) by promoting the false narratives that the IPC was controlled by the British government and that IPC leader Panduleni Itula was a British citizen.

In October 2024, AI-generated voice notes purportedly of Landless People's Movement (LPM) leader Bernadus Swartbooi making vulgar and tribalist statements about IPC leader Panduleni Itula circulated virally in social media spaces. The virality of the fake voice message prompted the LPM to issue a statement later that month distancing itself from the viral message and denouncing it as fake.

For more on this, read this *Namibia Fact Check report*.



Screenshot of the AI-generated voice message that was posted by an X (Twitter) account in October 2024. It was claimed that the fake voice message was a recording of LPM leader Bernadus Swartbooi making insulting and tribalist remarks about IPC leader Panduleni Itula in a bar. The voice message circulated virally in Namibian elections discussion forums for a while.

For more on this, read this *Namibia Fact Check* report.

The Swartbooi AI-generated fake voice message was followed at the end of October by AI-generated images and videos visualising the 'collapse' of the then ruling party presidential election candidate, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, at a party rally at Otjiwarongo, Otjozondjupa Region, going viral late in the month and into November 2024.

Screenshot of a post shared by an X (Twitter) account depicting the 'collapse' of the then ruling party presidential election candidate at a party event in late October 2024. The viral image was used to push the false narrative that the then candidate was unhealthy and too old.

Screenshot of the viral AI-generated video clip depicting the 'collapse' of the then ruling party presidential election candidate at a party event in late October 2024. The image clearly shows that the video was generated using a free online AI tool. The viral video clip formed part of a narrative campaign painting the then presidential election candidate as unfit, unwell and too elderly.

4. Conclusion

Just like other countries recently, Namibia's presidential and parliamentary elections of late November 2024 became a magnet for political mis- and disinformation. While this was unsurprising, it has to be noted that what was observed was nevertheless quite concerning and trending in a rather disturbing direction.

- First, it appears that there were or are actors engaging in continuous, concerted and coordinated digital disinformation activities and campaigns, which suggests that there are political interests invested in ensuring that resources are devoted to information manipulation on the Namibian electoral landscape. This indicates that, as more and more people, as trends suggest, get most of their information via social media and other online sources, **digital disinformation is set to become an increasingly pressing challenge on Namibian information landscapes.** The signs are already there.

- Second, it also appears that **relevant Namibian authorities, in this instance and for instance, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN), are and have been woefully underprepared and under-capacitated to deal with the rising tide of election-related digital disinformation**, as witnessed before and around the November 2024 elections.

- Third, it seems certain, given what was observed on the electoral information landscape ahead of, around and after the 27 November 2024 elections, that foreign actors were or are active on the Namibian electoral information landscape in influence campaigns. To what extent such influence campaigns have had an impact on the attitudes of Namibian voters, at least those who engage politically online, remains an open question. That said, **the fact that foreign actors and interests have been co-opted to overtly engage in influence campaigns suggests this is a phenomenon worth prominently flagging** in the interest of future elections and electoral integrity.

- Fourth, the emergent use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to generate content for online dissemination indicates that AI-generated political content, including disinformation content, probably will become a political and electoral headache down the line. While the AI-generated disinformation content observed on the Namibian electoral information landscape was still rather basic or crude and detectable, it seems clear that disinformation actors were experimenting and probably will become better and more sophisticated going forward. This means that **more sophisticated and hard-to-detect AI-generated content, including the use of deep-fakes, will increasingly appear on Namibian political and electoral information landscapes**, probably sooner than later.

- And, finally, the **abuse of social media and messaging platforms** by political actors and those associated with them is something that **now deserves and should attract serious multistakeholder, multi-disciplinary consideration and solution-finding deliberation.**

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About Namibia Fact Check

Namibia Fact Check is an impartial initiative that aims to verify public statements and media reports. Claims are fact checked for accuracy using credible data and information. Namibia Fact Check is a project of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) that was started in mid-2019 in response to a perceived rise in political mis- and disinformation and propaganda in Namibian online political spaces since 2017.

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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 into social, political and economic issues that affect development in Namibia. The IPPR was established in the belief that free and critical debate informed by quality research promotes development.

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