



# IJG Namibia National Elections 2024: Are We Heading For A Political Earthquake? October 2024

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## A Brief History of Namibia's Constitution – Adhered To But Amended Three Times

The Republic of Namibia is “a sovereign, secular, democratic and unitary State founded upon the principles of democracy, the rule of law and justice for all” that holds regular presidential and National Assembly elections every five years as laid out in the Constitution which was written by an elected Constituent Assembly and adopted on 9 February 1990, slightly more than a month prior to independence on 21 March 1990 when it came into force. Exceptionally, the Founding Father Sam Nujoma was appointed Namibia's first President by the newly-elected National Assembly rather than being directly elected by the people.

The Constitution has been adhered and there have not been constitutional crises but it has been amended three times since it was first approved: in 1998 (to allow for the Founding Father President Sam Nujoma to stand for a third term), in 2010 (to amend citizenship requirements, to decrease the tenure of National Council members from six to five years, to subject the appointment of non-Namibian judges to fixed term contracts, to insert an Article on anti-corruption measures, to change reference from the “prison service” to “correctional service”, and change the tenure of Regional Council Management Committees from three to two years), and in 2014 (to make numerous amendments including the provision for a Vice-President, on a second ballot for Presidential elections in cases where no candidate achieves more than 50% of the votes cast in the first round, and increasing the size of the National Assembly from 72 to 96 (and the number of appointed members from 6 to 8 members) and the National Council from two to three members from each region). Chapter 3 on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms cannot be changed even with a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly and National Council.

## Why Elections Matter to the Economy – Political Uncertainty and Changes of Policy

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the merits or demerits of democracy and regular elections but to examine the possible implications of upcoming elections on the Namibian economy. Broadly speaking there are two kinds of possible implications. The first arises from the political process itself when uncertainty created by an unclear or disputed electoral outcome and a subsequent protracted and difficult political transition to a new government can cause significant economic damage. The second arises from changes in economic policy which a newly-elected government might choose to pursue. For these reasons anyone with an interest in the economy must take an interest in elections. Will the transition be smooth and will new policies be enacted?

## A Brief History of National Elections – Substantially Free and Fair but a “Dominant Party Democracy”

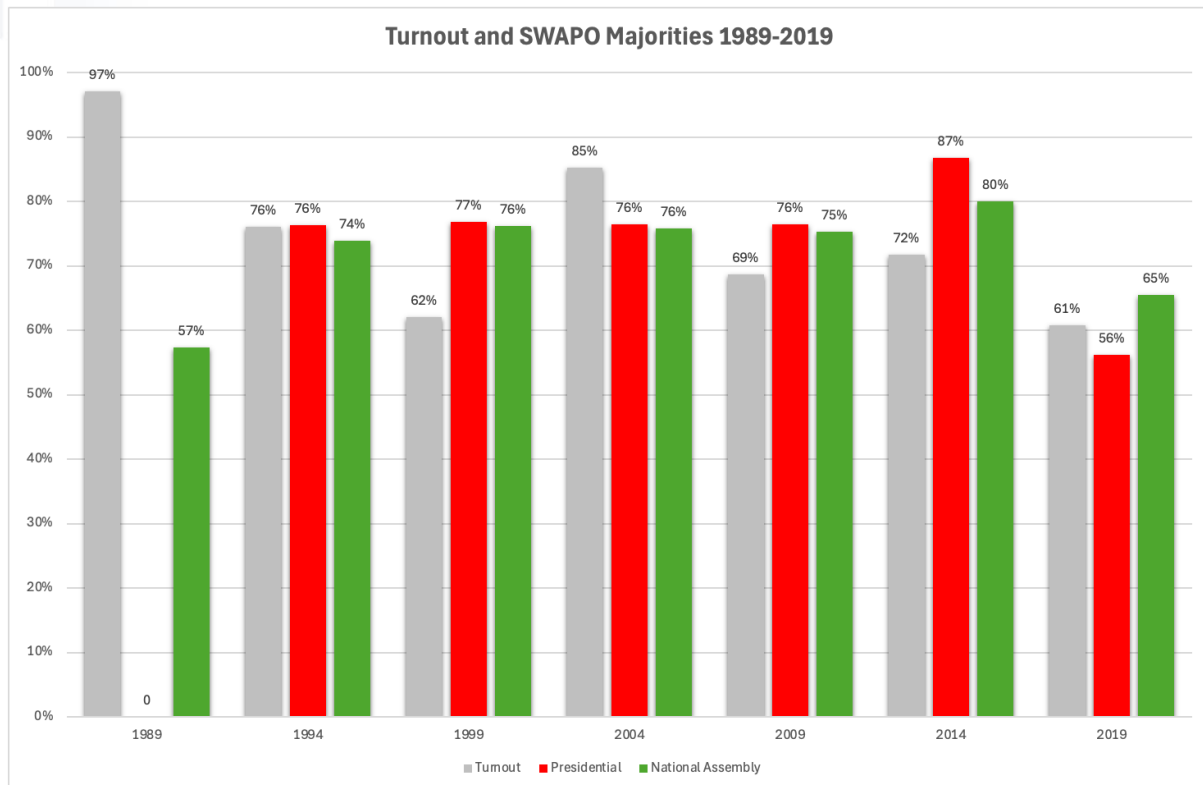
Since the first Constituent Assembly elections were held in 1989, Namibia has held six presidential and National Assembly elections. Elections have always taken place on time, and all have been deemed substantially free and fair by local and international observers. The country was considered “free” in the latest Freedom House assessment in 2023 and, at least procedurally, is considered a multiparty democracy<sup>1</sup>.

*Table 1: Dates of National Elections*

Election Date	Number of Presidential Candidates Standing	Number of Political Parties Standing	Number of Political Parties Winning Seats
7-11 November 1989	0	10	7
4-5 December 1994	2	8	5
30 November and 1 December 1999	4	8	5
15-16 November 2004	7	9	7
27-28 November 2009	12	14	9
28 November 2014	9	16	10
27 November 2019	11	15	10
27 November 2024	15	21	n/a

Source: Wikipedia and ECN

<sup>1</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>



Source: Wikipedia and ECN

The chart above provides information on voter turnout at national elections as well as the share of the presidential and National Assembly votes won by SWAPO. The following points are worthy of note.

Turnout has fallen since the Constituent Assembly elections of 1989, varying from as high as 85% in 2004 to as low as 61% in 2019. No long-term trend is apparent but turnout has always been higher when there is a new presidential candidate rather than a second-term candidate on the ballot paper.

SWAPO has won a two-thirds majority in every election since independence apart from the last election in 2019. This allowed the party to make the changes to the Constitution in 1998, 2010 and 2014 described above. SWAPO's majorities in the four elections from 1994 to 2009 were remarkably stable. Namibia has been what political scientists call a "dominant party democracy".

The number of candidates standing for presidential elections and the number of political parties standing for National Assembly elections has grown substantially. Not all the parties standing gained enough votes to secure seats in the National Assembly.

The official opposition – the party that receives the second largest share of votes for the National Assembly – has changed from the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance after 1994, to Ben Ulenga's Congress of Democrats after 1999 and 2004, to Hidipo Hamutenya's Rally for Democracy and Progress after 2009, and back to the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance after 2014 and, as the Popular Democratic Movement (as the DTA was called after 2017), after 2019 although it is worthy of note that the party's candidate did not come second in the presidential election.

The 2019 presidential and National Assembly elections stand out for several reasons. Overall turnout was low by historic standards. The SWAPO President's share of the vote fell significantly. Hage Geingob's first win was by a historically large margin of 87% but his second win was by a historically small margin of 56%. SWAPO lost its two-thirds majority in the National Assembly for the first time since 1994. However, with 65% of the vote this was only a narrow loss. With Hage Geingob as its presidential candidate, SWAPO's vote for presidential and National Assembly elections diverged for the first time. In 2014 Geingob was somewhat more popular than his party while in 2019 he was significantly less popular.

The 2019 presidential election was the first time that an opposition candidate had polled more than 20% since Mishake Muyongo in 1994 when he was just one of two candidates. Long-time SWAPO member and practising



dentist Panduleni Itula came from nowhere with no established party backing to poll just over 29% of the vote out of a field of eleven candidates. Itula followed this up by building a party - the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) formed in August 2020 - that went on to win in regional and local council elections in 2021.

These developments naturally raise some intriguing questions. Is Namibia finally becoming a genuine multi-party democracy rather than a dominant party democracy? Can a party other than SWAPO really challenge for power? Could the ruling SWAPO Party lose its majority altogether? Might there have to be a second round of voting in the presidential election? Could there be a split between who wins the presidential and the National Assembly elections? And what might this mean for economic policy?

## The Namibian Electorate – Voter Attitudes and Voting Behaviour are Changing

In looking to the future, the most important thing to appreciate is that the results of the 2019 elections did not come out of nowhere. Namibian political scientists have been diligently studying Namibians' attitudes and voting behaviour since 1999 when the first Afrobarometer survey was conducted<sup>2</sup>. Since then, nine more rounds of surveys have been conducted in 2002 (Round 2), 2006 (Round 3), 2008 (Round 4), 2012 (Round 5), 2014 (Round 6), 2017 (Round 7), 2019 (Round 8), 2021 (Round 9) and 2024 (Round 10).

*Table 2: Afrobarometer Rounds and Dates*

Afrobarometer	Year	Survey Period
Round 1	1999	September-October
Round 2	2002	March-June
Not a formal round	2003	August-September
Round 3	2006	13 February - 7 March
Round 4	2008	23 October - 3 December
Round 5	2012	19 November - 18 December
Round 6	2014	27 August - 22 September
Round 7	2017	November
Round 8	2019	5-22 August
Round 9	2021	31 October - 16 November
Round 10	2024	14 March - 2 April

Source: Afrobarometer

An excellent more detailed write-up of changing voter attitudes is available<sup>3</sup> but only selected issues are presented here for sake of brevity.

## Unemployment Remains By Far the Number One Issue for Voters

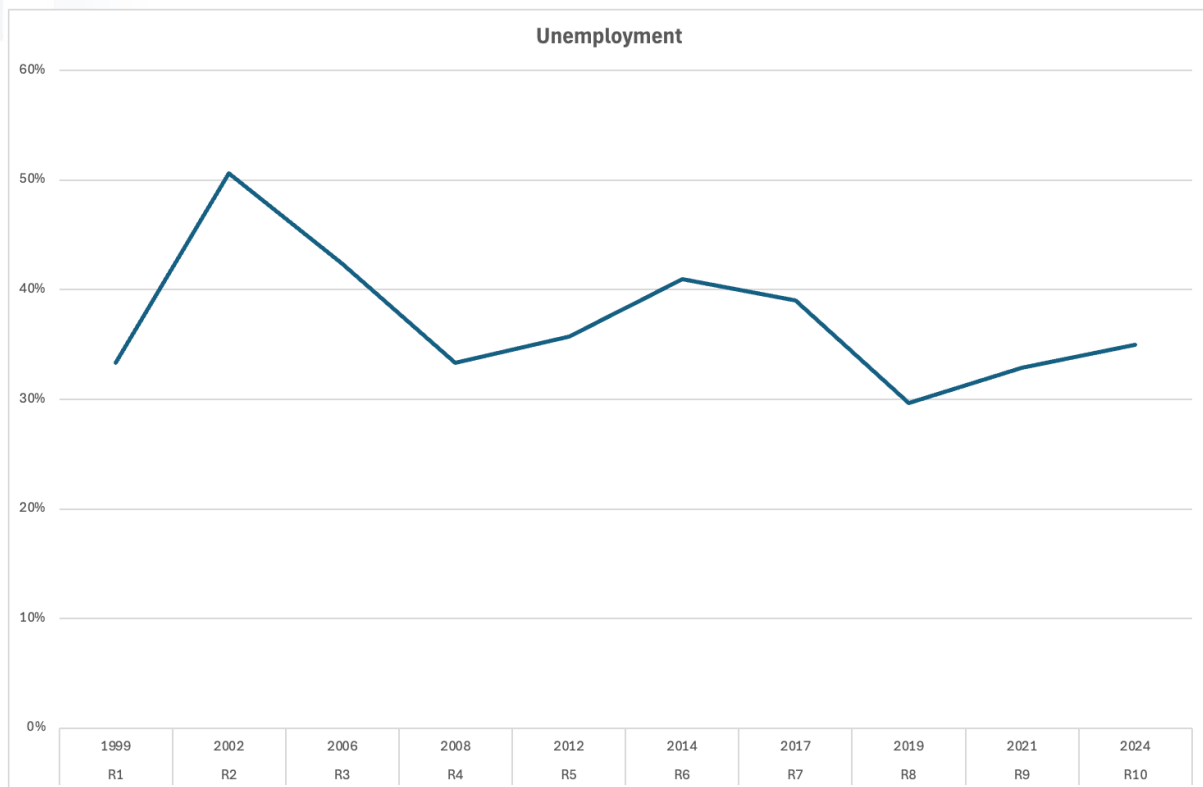
As far as the economy is concerned and by way of background, it is worth starting by looking at voters' most pressing problems. Afrobarometer asks:

**"In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?"**

A long list of potential problems is provided to choose from including "other". Respondents are requested to provide a first, second and third response. In every round of the Afrobarometer one issue dominates voters' concerns: "unemployment". The chart below shows the percentage of respondents that chose "unemployment" as their first response. Between 30% and 50% of respondents have chosen "unemployment" as their greatest concern. No other issue comes close. Only "poverty/destitution" has ever crept into a double figure response rate (in R4, R5 and R6).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.afrobarometer.org/> for more information.

<sup>3</sup> See Christiaan Keulder's article "Namibia: Heading for a fall? Government and party performance 1999–2021" in the book "[Dominant parties as governments in Southern Africa: Their changing nature and its implications for democracy and democratic consolidation](#)" edited by Lesley Blaauw and Dennis U Zaire.



Source: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

One consistent Afrobarometer finding therefore is that unemployment consistently features uppermost in voters' minds when it comes to issues of concern they believe government should focus its attention on. Of course in itself this response says nothing about HOW government should address unemployment. But it is worth noting that government last measured employment and unemployment in the Labour Force Survey of 2018 meaning that since 2018 government has not been keeping track of the one concern that is uppermost in voters' minds. The IPPR's Quarterly Economic Review of Q4 2019 highlighted Namibia's poor track record in creating formal private sector employment. Observers might speculate that from government's point of view it may be better that such information is not placed in the public domain. Yet people know their own circumstances and the Afrobarometer results suggest there may be significant political prizes for a party that can convince the electorate it can address the issue unemployment.

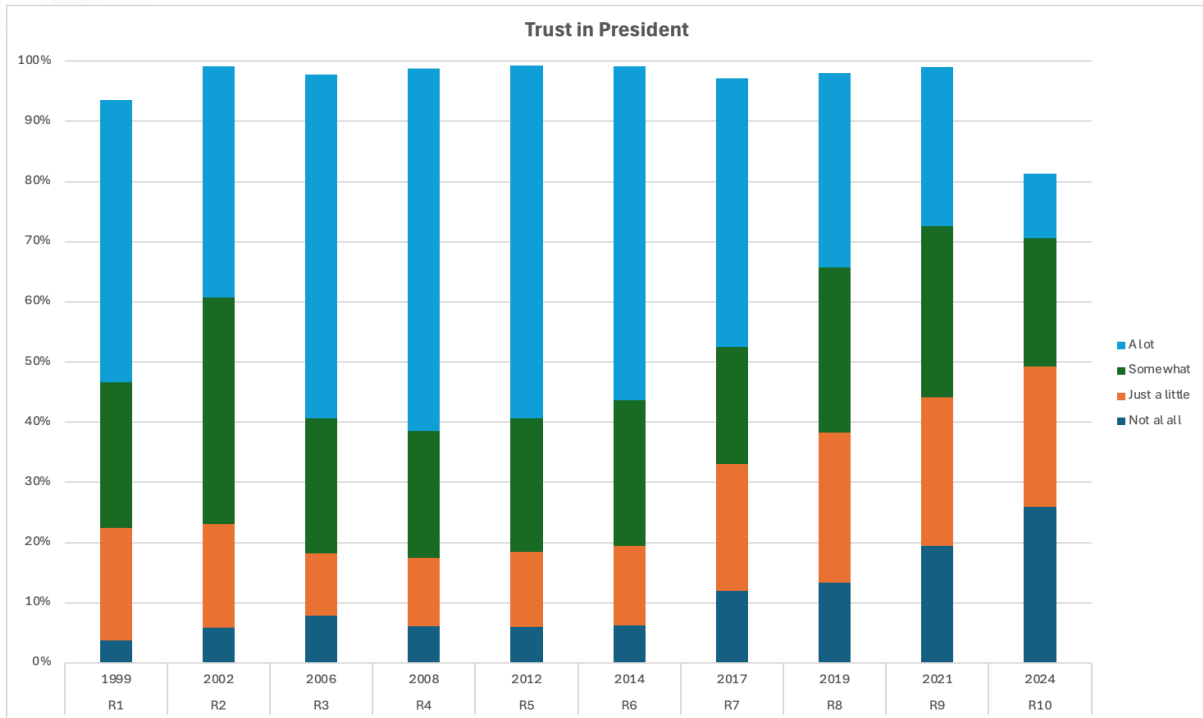
Afrobarometer surveys ask a wide range of questions. The latest round in 2024 included questions under headings: democracy, institutions, problems, economy, internet and mobile phones, corruption and social fraud, trust, security and crime, regional and global relations, environment and climate change, gender issues, ethnicity and identity, and Covid-19. Not all questions have been asked since the survey started in 1999 and some questions have been modified along the way which sometimes makes comparisons from year to year difficult or impossible. However, a core set of questions have remained the same in every round. For the purpose of brevity, this article will focus on trust in politicians, perceptions of corruption, and views on government's management of the economy.

## Trust in Politicians is in General Decline as Party Loyalties Weaken and Approval Ratings Fall

Afrobarometer asks people about the trust they have in politicians including the President, the Prime Minister, the National Assembly, the National Council, the Electoral Commission of Namibia, Local Authority, Regional Council, Regional Governor, the ruling party, opposition political parties, as well as the police, the army, the courts, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and civil society organisations.

**How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? The president: A lot, somewhat, just a little, not at all, no answer/refused/missing?**

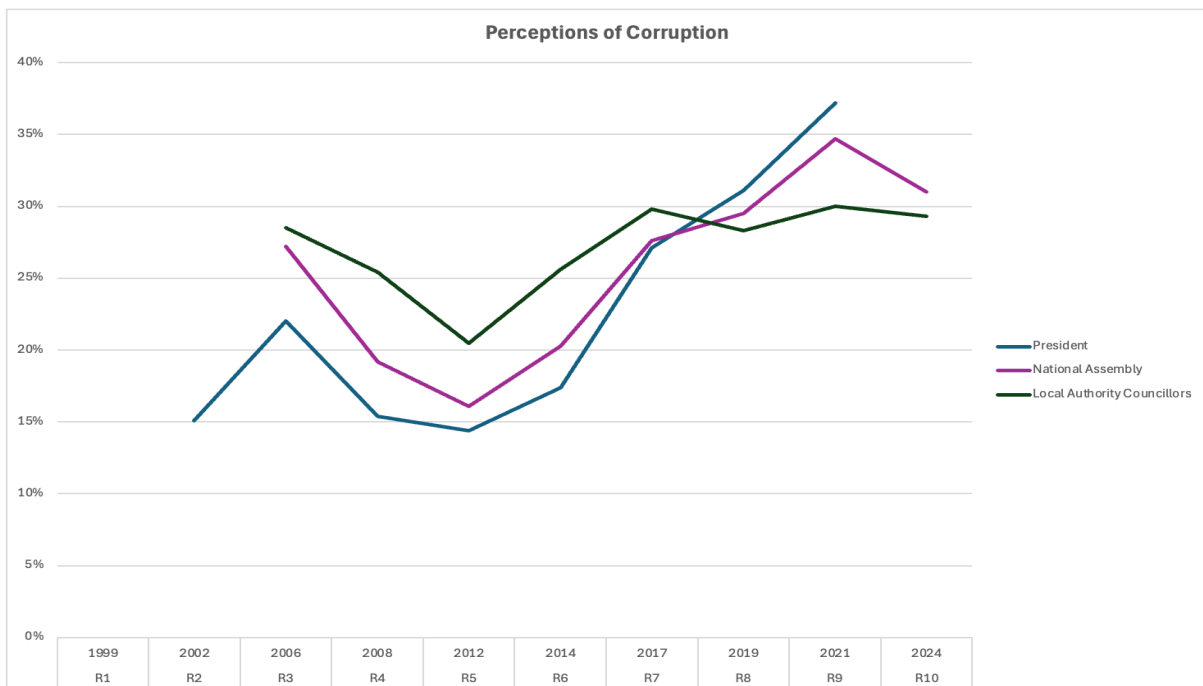
0.0003	13.04%
0.0001	50.00%
0.0003	14.29%
0.0005	12.50%



Source: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

The chart above shows levels of trust in the President over time and shows that high levels of trust existed until 2014 after which the proportion of people responding “not at all” or “just a little” rose significantly. In 2024 many more respondents than usual refused to answer this question. This decline in trust is apparent for other politicians and not just the president although the decline in trust for politicians from the ruling party is steeper since levels of trust were much higher to start with. The decline in trust goes hand in hand with lower approval ratings and weaker party loyalty.

### Perceptions of Corruption Have Increased

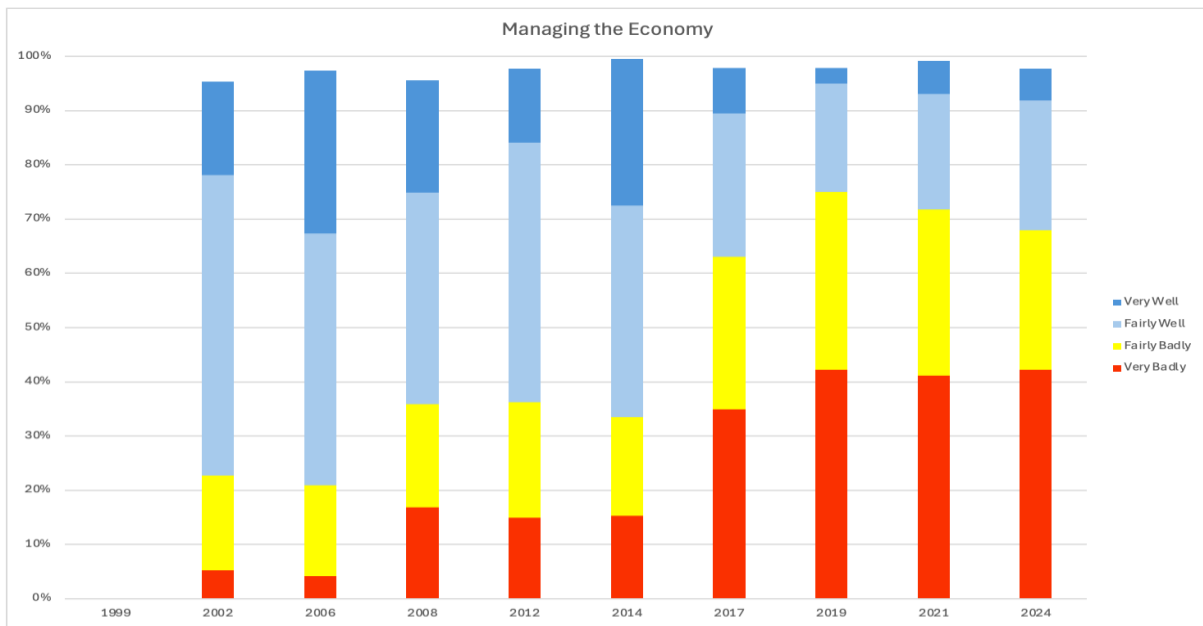


Source: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

0.0003	13.04%
0.0007	50.00%
0.0003	14.29%
0.0005	12.50%

Afrobarometer asks about people’s perceptions of corruption at different levels of government. The chart shows the percentage of people who responded that “most” or “all” members of the following official bodies – the President and officials in his office, members of the National Assembly, and Local Authority Councillors – were involved in corruption. The question about the President and officials in his office was not asked in Round 10. Perceptions of corruption seem to have declined during President Pohamba’s first term of office but then risen sharply after 2012. Two major corruption scandals erupted after 2012: the SME Bank in 2017 and Fishrot in 2019 but it is hard to link survey responses to particular instances of corruption in particular institutions. Perceptions were becoming more critical prior to both cases. Despite reporting minimal personal experience of corruption, Namibians have clearly become much more critical of different arms of government when it comes to corruption and see political elites increasingly indulging in corrupt practices.

### Voters Are Increasingly Critical of Government’s Handling of the Economy



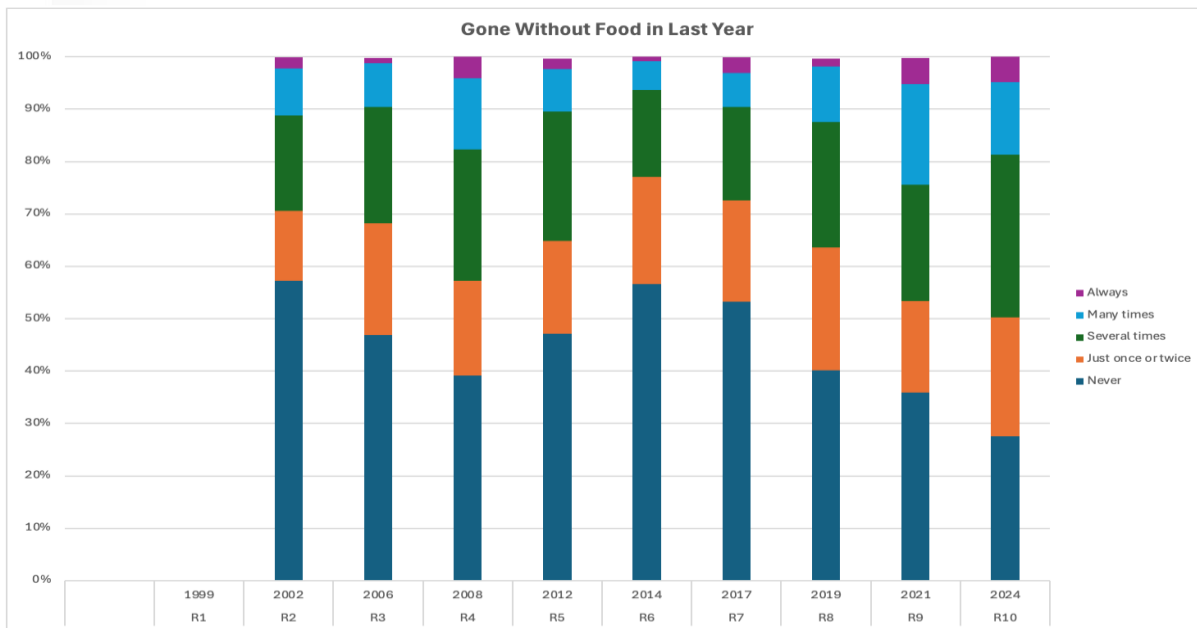
Source: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

#### How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say? Managing the economy? Very well, fairly well, fairly badly, very badly?

Afrobarometer asks people how they think government is managing the economy giving them the choice of responding “very well”, “fairly well”, “fairly badly”, “very badly” and “don’t know”. The responses appear to have changed over three periods: 2002-2006, 2008-2014, and 2017-2024 but the overall trend is clear, namely that Namibians perceive government’s handling of the economy to have deteriorated over time. Again, it is not easy to link these perceptions to particular events. The global financial crisis erupted in 2008 and the Covid pandemic struck in 2020. However, Namibia’s economy emerged strongly from the former posting six of its strongest years of growth between 2010 and 2015. From 2016 growth evaporated until the economy was struck by Covid in 2020. Whatever the case, over two-thirds of Namibians in the last three rounds of Afrobarometer perceive government’s management of the economy to be either “fairly bad” or “very bad”.



### More Namibians Are Suffering Hardship



Source: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

### Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Never, just once or twice, several times, many times, always?

Afrobarometer also tries to assess people’s living conditions and asks a variety of questions including about how often they have gone without food in the past year. There is a steady increase in the number of people who report going without food several times, many times and always.

Much has changed since Namibia gained independence in 1990. The population has grown from 1.4 million to 3.0 million. Almost half the present electorate was born after independence and has no direct experience of how things were before 1990. Society has transformed from being predominantly rural to one which is almost equally urban and rural. Namibians, especially young Namibians, are more educated than they have ever been and have far greater access to information via their mobile phones which allows them to compare their circumstances with those of people elsewhere. These factors and others are bound to lead to long-term changes in voter attitudes and behaviour from one which is almost unquestioningly trustful of and loyal to the ruling party to one which is more critical and questioning and more likely to switch votes. It is in this more mature democratic environment that the upcoming elections will take place.

### What Happened in 2019?

As already stated, the elections in 2019 were unusual in a number of ways. Despite the changes in voter attitudes described above, SWAPO only very narrowly lost its two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. The table below shows that the party retained overwhelming support in nine of the country’s fourteen regions. In the remaining five regions the party succeeded in gaining over 40% of the vote.





Table 3: Presidential Election 2019

	Registered Voters	Geingob	Votes	Share of votes	Turnout
Zambezi	45,303	17,482	23,307	75.0%	51.5%
Erongo	113,633	23,037	64,567	35.7%	56.8%
Hardap	48,547	10,083	24,744	40.7%	51.0%
//Karas	53,125	12,600	33,060	38.1%	62.2%
Kavango East	78,724	29,801	37,439	79.6%	47.56%
Kavango West	52,412	24,205	27,471	88.1%	52.41%
Khomas	257,559	48,955	137,392	35.6%	53.3%
Kunene	54,837	13,807	30,960	44.6%	56.46%
Omaheke	44,502	12,545	23,382	53.7%	52.54%
Ohangwena	146,452	75,745	104,149	72.7%	71.11%
Omusati	146,256	80,298	107,700	74.6%	73.64%
Oshana	115,197	43,214	87,191	49.6%	75.69%
Oshikoto	108,712	46,730	74,168	63.0%	68.22%
Otjozondjupa	93,209	25,627	49,374	51.9%	52.97%
		574	1,294	44.4%	
Total	1,358,468	464,703	826,198	56.2%	60.82%

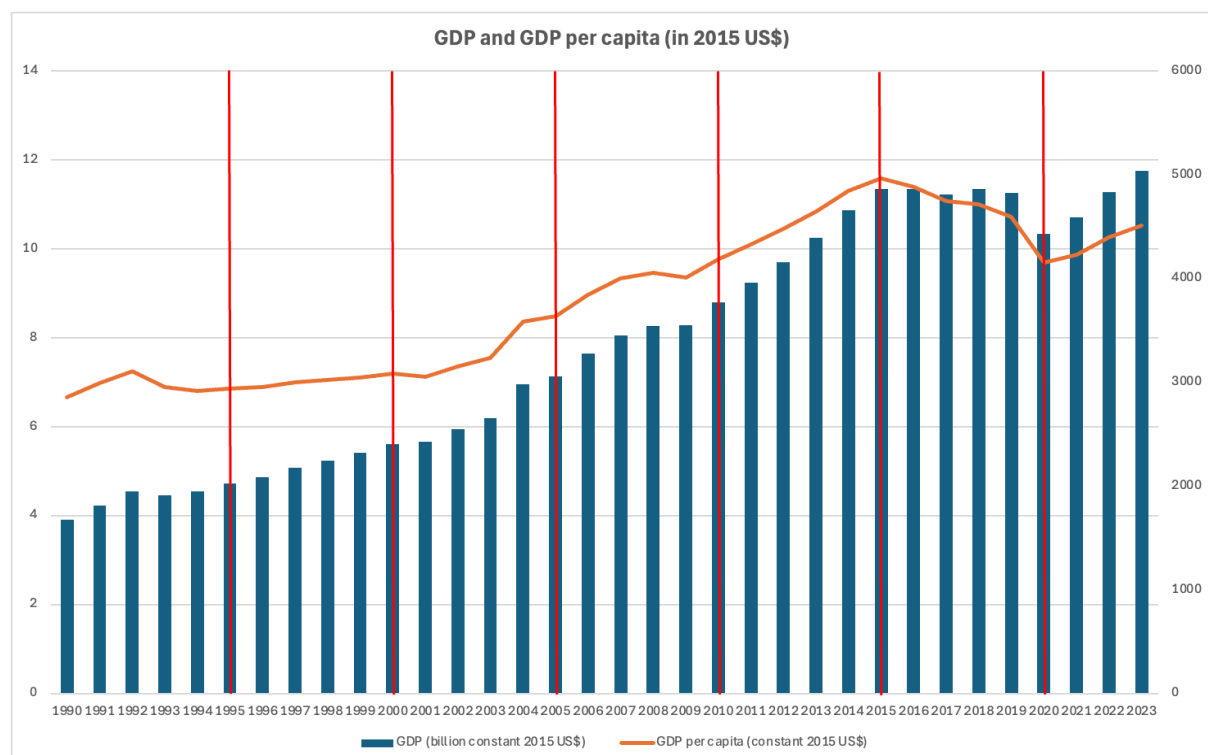
Source: IPPR

Table 4: National Assembly Election 2019

	Registered Voters	SWAPO	Votes	Share of Votes	Turnout
Zambezi	45,303	17,267	23,133	74.64%	51.1%
Erongo	113,633	29,476	64,493	45.70%	56.8%
Hardap	48,547	10,669	24,709	43.18%	50.9%
Karas	53,125	14,923	32,806	45.49%	61.8%
Kavango East	78,724	30,104	37,309	80.69%	47.4%
Kavango West	52,412	24,264	27,466	88.34%	52.4%
Khomas	257,559	64,465	135,468	47.59%	52.6%
Kunene	54,837	13,708	30,948	44.29%	56.4%
Omaheke	44,502	12,391	23,339	53.09%	52.4%
Ohangwena	146,452	85,846	103,707	82.78%	70.8%
Omusati	146,256	92,054	107,015	86.02%	73.2%
Oshana	115,197	56,121	86,194	65.11%	74.8%
Oshikoto	108,712	56,083	73,229	76.59%	67.4%
Otjozondjupa	93,209	28,684	49,122	58.39%	52.7%
		806	1,289	62.53%	
Total	1,358,468	536,861	820,227	65.45%	60.4%

Source: IPPR

The election was notable also for the fact that it took place after four years during which the economy had hardly grown at all and average incomes had fallen for the first time over a presidential term. GDP and GDP per capita often seem quite abstract concepts but they represent real developments in the economy and people’s lives. As the Americans would say “It’s the Economy Stupid!”.



Source: World Bank Country Data





## Parties are Promising More Employment, Less Corruption and More Economic Nationalism in 2024

Political parties in Namibia publish manifestos setting out their plans for government should they be elected into power. Yet it is hard to recall a manifesto or a manifesto commitment that has made much of an impact on past electoral outcomes. Only the Institute for Public Policy Research has gone to the effort of comparing outcomes with commitments, but this has not been done for every election. It is not clear who reads manifestos and how much notice is taken of them. SWAPO's manifesto has lived side-by-side with five-yearly National Development Plans, Vision 2030, and (under President Geingob) the Harambee Prosperity Plans 1 and 2. It is not clear how these plans relate to each other.

*Table 5: SWAPO Manifestos Since Independence*

1994: Equal Opportunities for All Namibians
1999: The Driving Force for Change
2004: SWAPO's Plan of Action for Peace, Unity and Sustainable Development
2009: Striving for Economic Independence and Prosperity for All
2014: Consolidating Peace, Stability and Prosperity
2019: Inclusive Development and Shared Prosperity
2024: Unity in Diversity: Natural Resource Beneficiation and Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development

Source: SWAPO

*Table 6: Party Manifestos for the 2024 National Elections*

Party	Manifesto
Popular Democratic Movement (PDM)	A Brighter Tomorrow: The PDM's Plan to Create Jobs, Build Homes, Expand Agriculture and Secure a Better Future
Independent Patriots for Change (IPC)	Strengthening Democracy and Building the Future: A New Vision for Namibia
Landless Peoples Movement (LPM)	Restoring Our People's Dignity: Our Guiding Principles Towards Liberty, Equality and Justice for All Namibians
National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO)	Towards an Inclusive Namibia for All
National Empowerment Fighting Corruption (NEFC)	People Manifesto 2024
Affirmative Repositioning	The AR Plan for Namibia: Our Country, Our Future, Our Time
South West Africa National Union (SWANU)	2024 Manifesto
Republican Party (RP)	The Republican Party 2024 Manifesto

Source: Political Parties

The SWAPO manifesto for 2024 entitled "Unity in Diversity: Natural Resource Beneficiation and Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development" is a 44-page document. It starts by listing the Party's achievements since 1990 taking the credit for holding "regular free and fair elections" and Namibia's impressive rankings on press freedom. It makes some rather questionable claims about the economy such as:

"The number of people in formal employment has more than doubled from just over 180,000 in 1990 to more than 725,000 in 2024."

But it contains plenty of achievements that stand up to scrutiny such as the high quality of Namibia's roads and high mobile network coverage.

It goes on to make commitments for 2025-2030 starting with two important statements:

"Pursue long-term fiscal sustainability through prudent fiscal management and ensuring sustainable budget deficits and public debt."

0,0005	13,04%
0,0003	50,00%
0,0003	14,29%
0,0005	12,50%

“Ensure a stable economic environment that fosters growth and attracts investment, laying the foundation for sustainable development.”

By and large the manifesto contains little that is new or radical and nothing too outlandish or populist and little to worry investors. It is more a restatement of existing policies. At the same time there is also nothing that will “move the dial”. The document is full of worthy statements and rather vague commitments that **the party cannot be held to**. Although natural resource beneficiation is included in the title and therefore is expected to form the centre piece of the document, it only commits to:

“Promote industrial growth, value addition to local products, and beneficiation of natural resources to create sustainable local and regional value chains and boost economic growth and prosperity.”

And

“Implement the Minerals Beneficiation Strategy (MBS), for critical minerals to boost economic activities through value chain development.”

On oil and gas, the Party promises it will “commit to ownership by Namibians of a sizeable and fair share in the Oil and Gas Industries to ensure that Namibians benefit from these natural resources” and “increase financial support to Namcor”.

It promises to carry out a feasibility study on an oil refinery and commits to going ahead with a desalination plant in the Erongo region. The commitment towards stimulating creative industries is new. Green hydrogen is mentioned once:

“Position Namibia as a key player in the production of Green Hydrogen and its derivatives, being domestic solar manufacturing and assembly plants, for electrolyses, refining of rare earth minerals and elements as well as biomass with a view to diversify the economy.”

But the ambitious job creation opportunities in green hydrogen that government has touted in public (600,000 or 240,000 jobs) are conspicuous by their absence.

A modest promise to “train professionals for a future nuclear industry” is made.

Possibly the most eye-catching fiscal proposals are to:

“Allocate a budget of approximately N\$85.7 billion over five years to Priority Projects that would create mass employment opportunities, leading to the absorption of unemployed graduates and other Namibians looking for jobs.”

“Provide financial support to the tune of N\$500 million per year to the National Youth Fund to empower youth to embark on various enterprises.”

And:

“Develop and implement the Targeted Basic Income Grant (TBIG) to care for the most vulnerable members of our society who do not qualify for the current social grants.”

The manifesto does not make clear how such promises can be squared with the commitment to fiscal sustainability.

A commitment is made to “revive the national airline under very well thought out strategies to avoid pitfalls of the past” and revive the Minerals Development Fund. Special Economic Zones feature but no mention is made of the Namibian Investment Facilitation and Promotion Bill, the National Equitable Economic Empowerment Bill, the new Minerals Act, the Namibian Investment Promotion and Development Board or public sector reform including reform of public enterprises although there is a commitment to:

0,0003	13.04%
0,0003	50.00%
0,0003	14.29%
0,0005	12.50%

“Enhance measures and increase accountability to prevent corruption in government offices, ministries, and agencies, public enterprises, regional councils, local and traditional authorities, and the private sector.”

In short, the manifesto offers more of the same. Almost as an afterthought the manifesto concludes by saying it “serves as a roadmap to propel us to shared prosperity as envisioned in Vision 2030” the only real mention of the Founding Father’s ambition for the country to become a high-income industrialised country which is due to be achieved by the end of this coming parliament. After 34 years voters know what they can expect from SWAPO. Much will depend on their perception of its presidential candidate, the soon to be 72-year-old Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. “Triple N” is a well-known quantity having served in Cabinet uninterruptedly since 2000 when she was appointed Director General of Women’s Affairs and is currently Namibia’s Vice President. Afrobarometer does not ask questions about individual party leaders or presidential candidates.

The official opposition, the Popular Democratic Movement, takes a very different approach to its manifesto “A Brighter Tomorrow: The PDM’s Plan to Create Jobs, Build Homes, Expand Agriculture and Secure a Better Future” which is a simple punchy two-page document. The title alone puts its finger on what are some of the key issues for the electorate. It has been criticised for recycling ideas from the 2019 manifesto but that is not necessarily a problem. The party lists 17 “priorities for government” including the following eight priorities:

1. “Reduce the unemployment rate to 11% by 2029 through our ‘One Constituency-One Factory’ policy intervention.”

This may sound good politically but forcing or encouraging private companies to set up in locations that are not economically or commercially beneficial will limit profitability or require open-ended subsidies from government.

2. “Fix the economy and slash government debt to at least 50% of GDP by 2029 to secure our fiscal sustainability.”

Although it is not quite clear what “fix the economy” means, thanks to the efforts of the current Minister of Finance, the debt reduction target is possible, even probable without too much effort provided the current rates of spending and economic growth continue.

3. “Trim the Executive to only 15 Ministers and 4 Deputy Ministers to drastically reduce government expenditure and avail more resources to our people.”

This might send an important political signal but would need to be accompanied by more far-reaching public sector reform if it is to free up significant resources.

4. “Reduce the Urban Housing backlog to only 30% by 2029 through our One Namibian – One Plot policy intervention.”

It is not clear what the starting point is here and how it would incentivise even more people to move to the urban areas.

5. “Increase the budgetary allocation for Agriculture to 10% in line with the Malabo Protocol to achieve agricultural modernisation and mechanisation.”

This can be achieved at the expense of other budgetary allocations but there is no evidence that public spending on agriculture to date has achieved very much. The key to modernisation and mechanisation is to bring in private investors.

7. “Renegotiate all government agreements pertaining to our natural resources in good faith to ensure that government is the majority shareholder in all deals pertaining to our mineral resources for the benefit of current and future Namibian generations.”

This is a populist policy that would see investment in natural resources disappear overnight. Private investors will not invest if returns accrue to government rather than shareholders.

8. “Enact legislation to compel that up to 50% of all natural resources undergo local value addition.”



No one can be forced by law to invest money to achieve this arbitrary target in a way that may not be profitable. It will only serve to frighten off investors.

9. "Implement a comprehensive social welfare programme for unemployed Namibians between the ages of 21 and 59, of which benefits shall be determined in-line with the annual performance of the economy."

There may be a need for such a programme but it has potentially huge fiscal implications and will require significant public sector reform if it is to be made fiscally sustainable.

The PDM used to be perceived as a more market-oriented party than SWAPO but it seems to have become a much more statist party believing it can dictate to private investors. The basic point that investors must be incentivised to invest seems to have been lost on the party. PDM's leader, the 47-year-old McHenry Venaani, is also well known to the Namibian electorate having been party leader since 2013 and was the party's presidential candidate at the last election when he secured just over 5% of the vote.

At the last election the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) had not yet emerged and its leader had stood for presidential election without the backing of a political party. Its abridged manifesto (or "social contract") "Strengthening Democracy and Building the Future: A New Vision for Namibia" is an 18-page document and is the only one of the three to lay out core principles which include:

1. Sound, evidence based, economic policy
2. Integrity and honesty – zero tolerance of corruption
3. An ability to deliver
4. Strong, open and accessible leadership

The manifesto has clearly had a greater technocratic input than either the SWAPO or PDM manifestos and contains ideas that do not appear elsewhere. It contains nothing that would scare investors, either local or foreign, but like the others it does imply enormous faith in its ability to create a responsive and capable government machine able to enact a sophisticated range of policies.

Like other manifestos, it puts jobs at the top of its priorities but is the only one to see entrepreneurship and reforming the business climate as the key to job creation. Its first commitment is to:

"Radically reform the business climate to ensure that Namibia moves from ranked in the bottom half of the world to the top 25% of nations by 2030 through a red-tape cutting committee with an evergreen mandate to continuously reduce and remove unnecessary regulations and restrictions, and to improve efficiency in implementing required regulations and restrictions."

"Implement significant pro-employment tax reform, focusing on small and new businesses, including a progressive non-mining corporate income tax rate with an exemption for businesses with profit below N\$2 million, a ceiling at 22% coupled with a dividend tax to incentivise business retention of income for investment and growth; and an increase the VAT threshold to turnover of N\$2 million."

And:

"Introduce legislation to enable full tax-deductibility for equity angel and venture investors into registered venture and angel investment vehicles, thus incentivising private risk-capital into unlisted equity."

The Party commits to:

"Remove wasteful budgetary expenditure by significantly reducing the number of Ministries, from 24 to 13, and reducing bloated political and technical structures."

And also:

"Introduce a general cash-income grant for vulnerable populations, managed and administered in a cost-effective manner utilising technology, electronic wallets and mobile phones."



Corruption is clearly a big issue for the IPC and the manifesto contains a full page of interesting ideas to address the problem including reforms to the Anti-Corruption Commission and greater transparency in government procurement, the allocation of mining and oil and gas licences, and the allocation of fishing rights. These are mostly not expensive ideas that could make a huge difference to how key sectors of the economy are managed and are perceived by the population.

The IPC's leader, the 67-year-old Dr Panduleni Itula, came from nowhere in the 2019 presidential election to win over 29% of the votes, gaining many votes that would otherwise have gone to opposition parties. Itula is unusual in the context of Namibian politics in that he has a professional background and is still a practising dentist. He is back for a second attempt but this time with a party behind him as well as eye-catching wins in the last local and regional council elections.

## What Could Happen on 27 November?

### **Namibia has probably passed "peak SWAPO" but it looks unlikely that the party will lose its majority.**

The last presidential and National Assembly elections in 2019 represented a huge blow to the prestige of the ruling SWAPO Party and particularly to the authority of President Geingob. The Fishrot scandal broke shortly before the election when Wikileaks started publishing the Fishrot Files on 12 November 2019 and two ministers resigned in its wake on 13 November 2019, something which was historically unprecedented in Namibia. Yet it is hard to say what lessons if any the Party drew from the setback. Corruption and mismanagement appeared to continue almost unabated: think the resignation of Defence Minister Peter Vilho, Namcor, NAMDIA, PSEMAS, health tenders, and Phala Phala, not to mention cases which have been left hanging such as the SME Bank. Perhaps the party knew it had to be more attentive and there would have been more corruption scandals if it had continued to receive the backing of two-thirds of the electorate? Perhaps it would have selected a different presidential candidate rather than one who made her pitch on the basis of not being corrupt?

The outcome of South African elections on 29 May 2024 certainly made an impression on Namibian observers of the political landscape. The ruling ANC's vote decreased from 57% in 2018 to 40% - largely because former President Jacob Zuma had broken away and formed uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) an ethnic Zulu party - and it was forced into a "national unity government" with the Democratic Alliance, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Patriotic Alliance (PA). The election demonstrated for virtually the first time in Southern Africa that a former liberation movement could share power through a peaceful election. It naturally begged the question whether something similar could happen in Namibia.

Although Namibia and South Africa share similar proportional representation electoral systems and certain historical similarities, there are a number of important differences which make this unlikely. First South Africa had suffered an unusually degree of "state capture" under former President Zuma to an extent that has not been the case in Namibia. South Africa's appalling electricity supply situation was but the most striking manifestation of poor policy and governance there that Namibia has simply not experienced. Second, the ANC's share of the vote had already fallen to 57% by 2018 and the breakaway of MK accounted for most of the votes that resulted in it only gaining 40% in 2024. SWAPO's vote stands at 65% and there has not been a breakaway similar to MK. Neighbouring Botswana, where the Botswana Democratic Party has been in power since independence in 1966, may offer a better example of what might happen in Namibia.

In theory, four combinations of outcome for SWAPO are possible:

Presidential	National Assembly
SWAPO win majority	SWAPO win majority
SWAPO lose majority	SWAPO win majority
SWAPO win majority	SWAPO lose majority
SWAPO lose majority	SWAPO lose majority

It is possible, even likely, that, as the long-term changes in the electorate continue – population growth, historical memory of the liberation struggle, urbanisation, education and access to information – the electorate becomes less loyal to the ruling party and more critical of the party's performance. That is not to say people will not vote for it in future if they can be convinced it will deliver what they want. But equally it is possible that disaffected voters decide not to vote rather than vote for an opposition party.



SWAPO won 65% in 2019 after four successive years of little or no growth and the first fall in average incomes at the end of a five-year presidential term. Since then, the country has experienced Covid in 2020 and the inflationary fallout from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine after February 2022, seismic events but not ones the ruling party can be held responsible for. SWAPO executed an extremely smooth and disciplined transition following the untimely death of President Geingob on 4 February 2024. President Mbumba has filled the role with dignity in a way that does him and SWAPO great credit making abundantly clear he does not want power himself and is happy to hand over to Ndaitwah. It is hard to identify an event that may have dented the ruling party's popularity to the extent that it loses its majority. Equally it is hard to see anything in its current offer to the country that would boost its popularity to any significant extent. After 34 years the country knows what it can expect from a SWAPO government. The SWAPO heartlands remained solid in 2019 and the latest Afrobarometer survey conducted in March and April 2024 suggests it retains far more support than any other party in Namibia.

*Table 7: Afrobarometer Question on Party Preference*

**Q98. If national elections were held tomorrow, which candidate's party would you vote for?**

	Urban	Rural	Men	Women	Total
APP (All People's Party)	0.8	0.3	1.2		0.6
COD (Congress of Democrats)	0.6		0.2	0.5	0.3
DPN (Democratic Party of Namibia)		0.3		0.3	0.1
MAG (Monitor Action Group)	0.1			0.1	0.1
NEFF (Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters)	2.8	1.7	2.7	2.0	2.3
NUDO (National Unity Democratic Organisation of Namibia)	2.9	3.5	2.8	3.5	3.1
RDP (Rally for Democracy and Progress)	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.8
SWANU (Swanu of Namibia)	0.8		0.4	0.4	0.4
SWAPO (SWAPO Party of Namibia)	40.8	62.3	48.3	53.4	50.8
UDF (United Democratic Front of Namibia)	1.5	0.8	0.8	1.6	1.2
UPM (United People's Movement)	0.3			0.4	0.2
LPM (Landless People's Movement)	8.2	2.6	6.3	4.9	5.6
PDM (Popular Democratic Movement)	4.8	5.0	5.8	3.9	4.9
IPC (Independent Patriots for Change)	6.5	3.4	6.2	3.8	5.0
NPF (National Patriotic Front of Namibia)	0.5		0.3	0.3	0.3
BCP (Body of Christ Party)	0.1		0.1		0.1
AR (Affirmative Repositioning)	0.9	0.4	1.3		0.7
Would not vote	10.7	3.6	7.2	7.5	7.4
Refused to answer	8.3	10.1	8.7	9.6	9.2
Don't know	8.4	5.2	6.8	7.1	6.9

Source: Afrobarometer Round 10

Yet it might be possible for the charismatic Itula to go a step further than last time and increase his vote in the presidential election beyond 29%. In a head-to-head with Ndaitwah, he may represent a more attractive option. Yet he is untested in government and elections are always about less than ideal alternatives. The 2019 election showed Namibians were starting to vote differently in the presidential and National Assembly elections. There are not many more opposition votes for Itula to pick up and there is little evidence he is making inroads into SWAPO's heartlands, something he would have to do to win a majority. If he manages to reduce Ndaitwah's vote below 50% there would have to be a second round of voting, something that has never happened in Namibia. Were that to happen all bets would be off. This is however unlikely but President Geingob's 56% slumped dangerously close to that crucial mark.

## What Implications Are There for Economic Policy? The Leopard Won't Suddenly Change Its Spots

The likelihood is, therefore, that there will be no political earthquake and SWAPO remains in government, possibly with a reduced majority. Policy continues much as before but with the new president (hopefully) paying more attention to cleaning up government and coming down harder on corruption. There is certainly nothing in its manifesto or its behaviour to suggest the party is suddenly going to turn into a modern, reforming, economically liberal, business-friendly party that raises Foreign Direct Investment and investment generally to the levels required to achieve growth rates of 5-10% a year which would significantly impact on unemployment and poverty. It is also unlikely to rock the oil and gas boat as this is the one significant economic development it can promise the electorate. Instead, SWAPO is likely to play it safe and perform very much as before so that when the next election comes round in 2029 it can promise that oil revenues are within sight which really is something that can swing an election.

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