

Namibia's Elections 2009: Democracy Without Democrats?

By Henning Melber

The smooth transition to Independence during 1989/1990, which followed a long and protracted anti-colonial liberation struggle, turned Namibia into an internationally applauded showpiece of African democracy. Based on a constitutionally enshrined multi-party democracy, the country set standards for controlled change within a normative framework in respect of what is generally labeled by those who hold the power of definition as "good governance". The South West Africa People's Organization (Swapo) of Namibia, the former liberation movement, seized legitimate political power as the result of United Nations supervised general, free and fair elections. In an appraisal of the first party president Sam Nujoma, to whom parliament in the course of his retirement from office as a head of state conferred the official title "Founding Father of the Republic of Namibia", the Swapo website, which became operational in mid-2009, states: "He successfully united all Namibians into a peaceful, tolerant and democratic society governed by the rule of law."¹

This sounds indeed like an impressive track record. The latest National Assembly and Presidential elections, held 20 years into democracy during 27 and 28 November 2009, seem to be a good reference point and litmus test to verify this ambitious claim. The official results released after a cumbersome procedure by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) on 4 December confirmed the overwhelming majority for Swapo, which operates as a de facto single party government ever since it obtained a 2/3 majority in the 1994 elections. It has since then consolidated its political hegemony into a 3/4 majority of votes during elections in 1999 and 2004. This time, Swapo again maintained its overwhelming dominance with almost the same proportional results. Democracy in Namibia seems to be a rather unilateral affair and underscores the slogan of the struggle days that "Swapo is the nation and the nation is Swapo".

The state of Namibian democracy

Notwithstanding a rights-based constitutional framework adopted at Independence, national sovereignty not automatically predetermined a vibrant, plural democracy with strong civil society components. Instead, the legacy of a century of settler colonialism had created rather restrictive mental dispositions. A survey among Namibians aged 18 to 32 concluded more than a decade after Independence that "Namibia does not have sufficient

¹ http://www.swapoparty.org/founding_president.html.

young Democrats to make the consolidation of democracy a foregone conclusion".² As if this would not be of enough discomfort, a follow up study added the not so flattering diagnosis that "Namibians are high in partisanship and low in cognitive skills".³ This touches on aspects of what could be termed the authoritarian character, resulting from the oppressive systems of both the settler colonial structures as well as the hierarchy of the anti-colonial movement particularly in exile. Both were by any standards not a fertile breeding ground for a human and civic rights inspired culture and environment, fostering democratic mindsets.⁴

It is therefore not too surprising that the Afrobarometer Network in a compendium of public opinion findings based on a total of three surveys in Namibia between 1999 and 2006 concluded that among the 18 countries surveyed "Namibians appear to be the most deferential to their elected leaders".⁵ In terms of the attitudes among citizens the Afrobarometer national survey of 2005 classified Namibia as "a democracy without democrats".⁶ A summary of Afrobarometer indicators from five surveys between 1999 and 2008 among a representative sample of around 1,200 persons concluded: "There is no obvious trend in support for democracy. It has fluctuated roughly around 60 percent across all five surveys." Furthermore: "Commitment to elections as the best means for selecting leaders declined by nearly 30 percent between 2002 and 2008."⁷

It would be misleading, however, to conclude on the basis of such empirical evidence, that Namibians would idle passively or show signs of fatigue with regard to political contestation. As a matter of fact, Namibian politics were the last two years livelier than before, and there are impressive features of a plural political culture in terms of public discourse. There is a wide panorama of print media and journalists operating rather independently from the influence of the dominant party.

With the break away of a fraction of former high-ranking political office bearers from the first (exile) generation of Swapo and the formation of the new Rally for Democracy and

² Christiaan Keulder/Dirk Spilker, In Search of Democrats in Namibia: Attitudes among the youth. In: Henning Melber (comp.), *Measuring Democracy and Human Rights in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute 2002 (NAI Discussion Paper; no. 18), p. 28.

³ Christiaan Keulder, *Changing Values and Attitudes: Can Civic Education Make a Difference?* Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research 2002 (IPPR Working Paper; no. 2), p. 24.

⁴ See for arguments and evidence seeking to substantiate this statement with particular reference to Namibia: Henning Melber, *Southern African Liberation Movements as Governments and the Limits to Liberation*. In: *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 121, September 2009, pp. 453-461.

⁵ Carolyn Logan/Tetsuya Fujiwara/Virginia Parish, *Citizens and the State in Africa: New results from Afrobarometer Round 3*. Cape Town: IDASA 2006 (Afrobarometer Working Paper; no. 61), p. 16.

⁶ Christiaan Keulder/Tania Wiese, *Democracy without Democrats? Results from the 2003 Afrobarometer Survey in Namibia*. Cape Town: IDASA 2005 (Afrobarometer Working Paper; no. 47), p. 26.

⁷ Afrobarometer, *Popular Attitudes toward Democracy in Namibia: A Summary of Afrobarometer Indicators, 1999-2008*. 13 August 2009, p. 1.

Progress (RDP) in late 2007, hitherto unknown dynamics entered the political stage and turned the election campaign into anything but a honeymoon. Already during 2008 some indicators suggested that the political climate in Namibia had markedly changed to the worse.⁸

A survey undertaken at the end of 2008 by the Afrobarometer project therefore warned: "The unprecedented fixation on the coming election, which seemingly has been underway for years, has already challenged the peace and stability of the country in ways unseen since independence. Emotions are running high, judging by the unprecedented confrontations around recent by-elections and political party rallies."⁹ As sensibly concluded by a local observer: "In the coming two years, if RDP's promise bears fruit, Namibia's democracy will be paraded and be shown up to have either matured or regressed to the level of other sorry states in Africa."¹⁰ Having since then navigated through a large part of the unknown territory, the results of the election and in particular the preceding months of an intensive election campaign provide some indication. But the final verdict over the direction, which Namibia's political culture will ultimately take, seems still pending.

The election campaign

With the elections in late 1994 Swapo expanded its absolute majority obtained in November 1989 into a 2/3 majority of seats in the National Assembly. In 1999 and 2004 this political hegemony was consolidated into a 3/4 majority of votes with 55 out of the 72 political mandates obtained, notwithstanding the challenges of the Congress of Democrats (CoD). The CoD was formed just ahead of the 1999 elections as first political alternative based on dissenting former Swapo activists. While it emerged as the official opposition by securing in both elections most votes among the parties contesting the Swapo quasi-monopoly of political power, it never managed to make inroads into the Swapo electorate.

In 2008, the CoD imploded over internal differences, power struggles and fights over resources. The two most prominent founding members with a Swapo history (at the time of parting from Swapo holding posts as ambassador and deputy minister respectively) separated. CoD president Ben Ulenga and Ignatius Shixwameni as president of the newly established African People's Party (APP) both managed to survive politically by securing enough votes to become their parties' only elected MPs for the legislative period 2010-2015.

⁸ See Henning Melber, War or Peace? Authoritarian Polarisation Versus Political Pluralism. In: The Namibian, Windhoek, 19 December 2008.

⁹ Afrobarometer, Namibia Political Party Prospects Leading to the 2009 Elections. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research (Afrobarometer Briefings), 12 March 2009, p. 1.

¹⁰ Tangeni Amupadhi, Tremor shakes Namibian politics. In: Perspectives. Political analysis and commentary from Southern Africa (Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Foundation), no. 1, 2008, p. 6.

The RDP emerged as the only relevant substitute for the CoD. It was founded by two former members of Cabinet, Jesaya Nyamu and Hidipo Hamutenya, who were both political heavyweights from the first struggle generation in exile, before losing a Swapo internal power struggle over the succession of Sam Nujoma as head of state. Given the new party's affinity also to parts of Swapo's regional stronghold in the Northern region of Namibia, the RDP was considered to be a serious challenge to Swapo's dominance. This widely held perception contributed to the aggressive Swapo response. RDP was denounced to be composed of traitors, who were labelled as agents of imperialism and remote controlled pawns acting in the interest of regime change. The responses from both higher party levels as well as by local grass root activists were heavy handed and contributed to a climate of repression hitherto unknown. A witch-hunt for so-called hibernators, suspected to undermine as moles for the RDP the Swapo structures from the inside, was initiated and marred the public discourse for the last two years.

On various occasions the right to campaign freely was denied to RDP activists, who were accused of provoking Swapo supporters in their local strongholds. Properly registered political rallies were prevented to take place in public space with the argument that they were arranged in Swapo territory. This led to several clashes between members of both parties and acts of physical violence. Police forces had to intervene on several occasions and dispersed the crowd by using teargas. For the first time since Independence, an election campaign in Namibia turned visibly ugly. Leading political office bearers in the two main rival parties were ignoring an orderly conduct and used aggressive language bordering to hate speech. The tensions were indicative of the degree of contestation and confrontation. The degree of intolerance did not abide well for the state of Namibian democracy.¹¹

The election process

The Namibian electorate for the first time cast its votes on two consecutive days (27 and 28 November). The reform of the electoral law also provided for a vote count at the polling stations in the presence of observers. However, the results were then transmitted to the headquarters of the ECN in Windhoek for final verification before they were announced. This resulted in a considerable delay, so that the official end result was made known after days of speculation only on 4 December. Given the relatively small number of votes counted (just exceeding 800,000), this added to the irritation among those already afraid of manipulation.

In spite of such concerns, the Minister for Diplomatic Affairs in the Office of the President of Mozambique was the first to present as head of the 120-member SADC Electoral Observer

¹¹ See for details Henning Melber, Namibian Politics: The pathology of power and paranoia. In: The Namibian, Windhoek, 27 November 2009 (also published in: Pambazuka News. A Weekly Electronic Forum for Social Justice in Africa, no. 459, 26 November 2009).

Mission (SEOM) a complete and unreserved whitewash of the elections as “transparent, credible, peaceful, free and fair”.¹² Observer missions from the Parliamentary Forum of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) were also declaring the elections as free and fair as early as 1 December. A spokesperson of the 40-member SADC observer team recommended to return to one polling day in compliance with the other SADC countries and to allocate equal airtime to all parties during the election campaign in the state owned broadcasting company NBC. He noted “vigorous coverage of the electoral process in a balanced manner” by the local (predominantly private owned) print media but criticised the state broadcaster NBC for its bias in favour of Swapo.¹³

In the presentation of the preliminary report of the 24-member observer mission from the AU, retired Tanzanian Justice Lewis Makame combined its approval of the elections with a reference to “minor problems”, which included a “painstakingly slow” counting process. It found fears of vote rigging expressed among the opposition parties not supported by evidence but felt at the same time “not in the position to say that there was no rigging”.¹⁴ The 17-member observer mission of the Pan African Parliament (PAP) presented a day later a more nuanced assessment with some noteworthy critical undertones. It questioned the policy of the state owned radio and television company NBC, which it accused of un-due support to Swapo, and recommended that “the State media in Namibia be insulated from direct Government control by the establishment of an independent media institution with the responsibility of appointment and dismissal of heads of State media”. Mission leader Ambrose Dery from Ghana also raised concern over the printing of 1.6 million ballot papers (for an registered electorate below one million) as a potential recipe for vote rigging. Although the mission had concluded that the elections took place within the constitutional and legislative framework, it felt that Namibia could do much better.¹⁵

For the first time in Namibian elections local civil society institutions had formed own election observation teams. The Namibian Institute for Democracy (NID) in a statement declared that it had noted several minor flaws but not observed any grave irregularities and therefore trusted that the results were by and large credible. It announced a more detailed report for January, and noted “problematic issues relating to the often inept performance of some ECN officials, problems with the voters roll and the system of counting and verification of ballots, exacerbated by the large number of tendered ballots”, which “led to

¹² SADC Electoral Observer Mission (SEOM) to the Republic of Namibia. Preliminary Statement by Hon. Francisco Madeira, Minister for Diplomatic Affairs in the Office of the President of the Republic of Mozambique and Head of SADC Observer Mission to the Presidential and National Assembly Elections in the Republic of Namibia, held from 27-28 November 2009, undated (30 November 2009), p. 15. Accessible at:

<http://www.africanelections.org/namibia/features/page.php?news=4749>.

¹³ Brigitte Weidlich, SADC Parliamentary Forum Says Polls Fair. In: The Namibian, 2 December 2009.

¹⁴ Nangula Shejavali, AU Mission Gives a Thumbs-Up. In: The Namibian, 2 December 2009.

¹⁵ Nangula Shejavali, Namibia could do better: OAP observers. In: The Namibian, 3 December 2009. Recommendations of the Interim Statement released are accessible at: <http://www.africanelections.org/namibia/news/page.php?news=4760>.

the announcement of the final election results only a week after polls closed. This casts a shadow over what otherwise could have been exemplary elections and may now lead to the non-acceptance of results by the biggest opposition political parties, which is regrettable. Logistical and organisational deficiencies of the ECN in organising the elections are a matter of concern. (...) The relatively low voter turnout in some constituencies is a matter of concern.”¹⁶

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), which had created an election watch website¹⁷, also refrained from any fundamental criticism and seemed largely satisfied that the results reflected the will of the voters.

Most opposition parties were less reconciliatory. Eight of them announced in a joint statement on 4 December that they will bring a list of irregularities to the Namibian justice system to seek a clarification in court if and to what extent the election results were acceptable.¹⁸ Already in 2004/5 this had led to a legal battle ending in a re-count of the votes with an ultimate confirmation of the results. Queries by those initiating legal intervention include not only the delay in the announcement of the official results through a verification process of which the parties were not informed in advance, but also the disputed voters role with differing figures at different times, reports of multiple registrations, incidences where the supposedly undeletable ink marking fingers of those who had voted could be removed, as well as the fact that the ballot papers for both the National Assembly and the Presidential elections were marked by pencil. In one case two officials were arrested for the unauthorized opening of a ballot box at the polling station during the two days of voting.

Further suspicion created the exceptionally high number of votes cast in several districts (in contrast to markedly less votes in other districts with less support for the governing party). According to Namibian election laws tendered votes can be cast in other polling stations than the one they are registered with. As a result, three polling stations in the Northern stronghold of Swapo recorded 129%, 133% and 135% of registered votes respectively. Since these were located in rural districts with a low degree of mobility in the sense of influx from other regions, this is more difficult to explain than the exceptionally high rate of votes in some of the urban centers such as Swakopmund (112%), Walvis Bay (110%), and two districts in Windhoek (104% and 101%). Some consider this as evidence for ballot stuffing. Such disturbing results give at least food for thought if possibly the over-eager appeals of

¹⁶ Preliminary Statement by the NID on the 2009 National and Presidential elections. Accessible at <http://www.nid.org.na/>.

¹⁷ <http://www.electionwatch.org.na/>.

¹⁸ Brigitte Weidlich, Opposition off to court with ECN. In: The Namibian, 7 December 2009. The eight parties are the RDP, RP, UDF, NUDO, APP, CoD, NDMC and DPN. The five other opposition parties MAG, CP, DTA, NDP and SWANU were not part of this initiative.

some leading Swapo politicians during the election campaign to secure 150% of the votes or at least all parliamentary seats were taken too serious by some of the loyal local activists.

The election results

Notwithstanding such dubious symptoms, many observers would however concede that the Swapo dominance only reconfirmed the firm and efficient control exercised over the Namibian electorate by the party in political power. If only to the dislike of some, Swapo's political rule in Namibia for a series of reasons – not least the failure of dissenting views to organize effectively in opposition parties - resembles all features of a dominant party system.¹⁹ This is hardly reason enough to blame the winner.

For the first time a considerable number of young voters were able to express their preferences. These “born free” were during the pre-election build up due to their sizeable numbers considered to be of some influence over the outcome and hence a much speculated “unknown variable”. According to an Afrobarometer survey of late 2008 Swapo underperformed in terms of party attachment among younger voters (18-34 years). Core support remained primarily with “older, rural, and respondents with less education, especially from the north-central areas”, while “urban, female, and younger voters represent a growing challenge for the ruling party in terms of party closeness or identification”.²⁰

This certainly could not add comfort to the political minds in Swapo and could have positively influenced the campaign strategy as for the first time the cultivation of the liberation gospel was complemented by an emphasis on the claimed achievements under a Swapo government since Independence. At the end, the “born free” seemingly did not play any decisive role in changing the voting pattern. One among those casting their vote for the first time might offer some insights into the motivations, which risk to be overlooked by the urban-based perspectives of many of the analytical observers. In recalling her grandfather during her childhood days in the rural North, she states:

“Today he lies peacefully in his grave alongside a tarred road that does not witness the darkness I was so terrified of during my village-life experience. My people in that former

¹⁹ André du Pisani/William A. Lindeke, *Political Party Life in Namibia: Dominant Party with Democratic Consolidation*. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research 2009 (IPPR Briefing Paper; no. 44); Henning Melber, “SWAPO is the Nation and the Nation is SWAPO”. *Government and Opposition in a Dominant Party State – the case of Namibia*. In: Karolina Hulterström/Amin Y. Kamete/Henning Melber, *Political Opposition in African Countries. The Cases of Kenya, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe*. Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute 2007 (NAI Discussion Paper; no. 37), pp. 61-83.

²⁰ Afrobarometer, *Namibia Political Party Prospects...*, op. cit. (note 9), p. 8. For a variety of empirical details from the survey, which was undertaken between 23 October and 3 December 2008 among 1,200 Namibians interviewed see Afrobarometer, *Summary of Results. Round 4 Afrobarometer Survey in Namibia*. Published in cooperation with the Institute for Public Policy Research. Windhoek, undated (2009).

little village of Bukalo are now building on plots of a declared settlement that harbours two secondary schools within five minutes walk from each other. For every visit home, I see no sight of any teenage girl walking long distances to a waterhole. I drink clean ice-cold water from almost every home in this growing settlement. That means our tax dollars have been invested in building, rebuilding and upgrading our nation's infrastructure, improving our children's education and the livelihood of our communities. A vision was set, thus my choice was finally made because I want to see history being made for the reference of the current generation. This is for my grandparents and all of my family that came before them that did not live to see how far our country has come. I want to see the struggles and sacrifices that they made honoured. Today I voted in an environment where all Namibians from different backgrounds were able to shake hands in a voting queue and use those long hours to share their humour without looking at each other with questioning eyes."²¹

National Assembly Elections

Acknowledging the relevance of such perception as part of the present social reality of Namibia it should finally come as no shocking surprise that the official end results announced by the ECN²² confirmed the hegemonic status of Swapo despite the RDP's claims and earlier expectations that it would be a serious contender. The table is compiled on the basis of the official figures released. It documents that little has changed in terms of the fundamental political power relations for the forthcoming five-year legislative period.

National Assembly Election Results 2009

Party	Votes	%	Mandates
SWAPO Party of Namibia (SWAPO Party)	602,580	74.29	54
Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP)	90,556	11.16	8
DTA of Namibia (DTA)	25,393	3.13	2
National Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO)	24,422	3.01	2
United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF)	19,489	2.40	2
All People's Party (APP)	10,795	1.33	1
Republican Party of Namibia (RP)	6,541	0.81	1
Congress of Democrats (COD)	5,375	0.66	1
South West Africa National Union (SWANU)	4,989	0.62	1
Monitor Action Group (MAG)	4,718	0.58	0
Democratic Party of Namibia (DPN)	1,942	0.24	0
Namibia Democratic Movement for Change (DMC)	1,770	0.22	0

²¹ Charity Mwiya, Yes I Voted... But Why? In: The Namibian, 1 December 2009.

²² <http://www.ecn.na/Pages/home.aspx>.

National Democratic Party (NDP)	1,187	0.15	0
Communist Party (CP)	810	0.10	0
Rejected Ballots	10,576	1.30	
Total	811,143	100.00	72

The loss of one seat for Swapo is certainly anything but a defeat. The party will however be well advised to take note of the “pockets” of dissenting votes cast in some of the urban centers as well as the central and southern parts of the country. In parts of the Caprivi and Kavango it has strong contestation from RDP and APP respectively. Among the Damara the UDF under Chief Garoeb remains the most popular albeit locally confined force while among the Herero communities Chief Riruako draws considerable support for NUDO. Herero support is also provided to the DTA as represented by Katuutire Kaura and most likely the Herero leadership in SWANU.

At some polling stations in Windhoek the RDP emerged as the winner and Swapo also lost a majority among the Baster community in Rehoboth to the RDP. Swapo's majority in the Southern and Eastern regions has been reduced. It relies more than ever since the first elections for Independence again on the stronghold in the so-called four O-regions of the former Ovamboland (Oshana, Omusati, Oshikoto and Ohangwena), where it is for historical reasons firmly anchored and remains despite the RDP challenge (with their leaders coming from some of these regions) not only by far the biggest but in most areas still the only fish in the pond. Given that this is the electorate, which holds more than half of the votes, even Swapo – like most of the smaller parties – bears traces of an ethnical character.

Despite being the new kid on the bloc, and notwithstanding the fact that it has emerged as the new official opposition, RDP has little reason to celebrate. Its leadership certainly had much bigger hopes and publicly proclaimed markedly higher aspirations during the election campaign. Measured against the expectations thereby created a sobering time has started. While RDP boasted to have a database with close to 400,000 supporters, they only managed to garner less than 100,000 votes. Four out of their eight MPs taking seats in the National Assembly as from 21 March 2010 have in their earlier political life already been representing SWAPO in this august house. They will have to show in the five years ahead that they can make a difference and are more than old wine in new bottles. This will not be an easy task, especially when confronted with a merciless dogmatic and unforgiving dominance of SWAPO, which will be anything but accommodating.

The predictable top loser has been the CoD, which collapsed from official opposition status into irrelevant marginality. That the two party founders managed to survive on one mandate each under the CoD flag and the newly established APP only testifies to the ethnic-

regional dimension of the latter's party leader Shixwameni in the Kavango capital of Rundu. The same pattern of ethnical-local support applies to some extent also to the RP, DTA and MAG, which draw most votes among the white electorate. Their declining influence can be seen as a further political marginalization of the white minority, which is hardly any longer represented in the National Assembly. The replacement of MAG as the conservative Afrikaans speaking advocacy group by SWANU as the oldest anti-colonial organization in existence has most likely no immediate political impact. But it represents a remarkable symbolic shift in terms of emancipation from a not so long ago settler-colonial past. SWANU can be seen as the winner among the smaller parties.

Despite its long track record in the anti-colonial struggle and several tests through internal differences over its political positioning, which resulted in almost suicidal splits prior to Independence, it has for the first time managed to obtain representation in the National Assembly. This might be the result of some visible campaigning efforts, which left a mark in the public sphere. If this is the case, then Namibian democracy seems to indeed exist at least to some encouraging degree, as SWANU through its active promotion of the party's program would have managed to obtain votes. Its party president elected into the National Assembly on the last seat available (and some 200 votes ahead of MAG) has declared to use the parliamentary forum for the promotion of the party's socialist policy program.

Maybe this allows him (given the lack of support to the CP) to contribute to a discourse, which assists in bringing about more equality for the majority of the population – including the women, who might have been the biggest losers in Namibian society during these elections. Their number among the parliamentary representatives decreased to 16 – a far cry from reasonably equal representation.

Presidential Elections

The results of the presidential election, conducted in a parallel voting act on separate ballot papers, showed – as in all previous elections – that the votes for Swapo's candidate actually exceeded those for the party. Hifikepunye Pohamba received almost 9,000 votes more than the party list, which underscores his status as respected leader who is entrusted by the electorate with running the affairs of the Republic as the head of state. Already exceptionally high approval rates during the latest Afrobarometer survey placed him among the highest ranked democratic presidents.²³ This is a remarkable vote of confidence after a number of internal disputes during his first term in office, when party factions challenged

²³ Afrobarometer, The State of Democratic Consolidation and Economic Performance in Namibia. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research (Afrobarometer Briefings), 12 March 2009, p. 8.

his policy of reconciliation towards some party members accused of being “unreliable”. Here are the top runners as extrapolated from the official figures²⁴:

Presidential Election Results 2009

Candidate	Votes	%
Hifikepunye Pohamba (SWAPO)	611,241	75.25
Hidipo Hamutenya (RDP)	88,640	10.91
Katuutire Kaura (DTA)	24,186	2.98
Kuaima Riruako (NUDO)	23,735	2.92
Justus Garoeb (UDF)	19,258	2.37

The re-elected president Pohamba could use this vote of confidence into his abilities as office-bearer to execute with authority his comparatively moderate line of policy. Originally almost forced into office as the declared crown prince of the Founding Father Sam Nujoma and reluctant himself to pursue such a career, he represented a reconciliatory approach and firmly declared to combat corruption. During his first term in office, he did not meet up to the expectations created but showed too often leniency towards the orthodox party hard-liners pushing for a more exclusivist and dogmatic approach. At times he seemed to be caught between his party loyalty and his own values of a man, who prefers peace and harmony to polarization. Inspired by conservative Christian values, he hardly represented antagonistic tendencies but rather sought dialogue and promoted mutual respect. For him the slogan “unity in diversity” seemed to have meaning, though at times he also bowed to pressure by articulating more the arrogance of power the dogmatic party faction prefers. It occasionally looked as if he was a prisoner of his loyalty to the party while he personally would have liked to pursue other options to seek a common understanding with those parts of Namibian society not convinced that Swapo alone is the best for the country.

Only when his candidacy for a second term started to be questioned by those who preferred a more autocratic leadership style and a rigorous purge of those suspected not toeing the hard-core line, he stood up to defend his claim for being the party’s elected president and therefore the obvious and only candidate for nomination. He thereby visibly challenged (and silenced at least in public) the efforts to erode his legitimacy. Originally perceived as an interim president for one term in office only, he now has another five years to maybe convince those doubting his perseverance and steadfastness that he indeed is the president able to bring more harmony and respectful interaction to the country’s political culture. The retired autocratic president and firebrand Sam Nujoma had never stopped to be politically active but continued to pull strings. He provided the media also during 2009 with

²⁴ <http://www.ecn.na/Pages/home.aspx>.

some stunning examples of Mugabe-style polemics. These were hardly suitable to support the claim about his civilizing mission quoted in the introduction to this report. It remains to be seen to what extent his time is gradually coming to an end. The fraternity between him and his handpicked successor has certainly been damaged, since Pohamba did not live up to the expectations following his master's voice.

The list of party candidates for the new National Assembly had no clear handwriting of either Nujoma or Pohamba but reflected more so a gradual shift in generation from the first original Swapo cadres (who approach a biological expiry date) to a younger age group. More so, the appointment of the new Cabinet to be sworn in on 21 March 2010 might provide evidence (or at least promotes further speculation) on who currently has the ultimate say in party matters.

Namibia's democratic future: an outlook

While Swapo and his president can with confidence claim to have defended their hegemonic role and mastered the RDP challenge, the next five years might prove to be decisive in terms of the political culture pursued. If the dogmatic and narrow-minded equation that only Swapo alone stands for Namibian patriotism prevails, the country's already damaged reputation will suffer more and the internal divisions will deepen further. The peaceful conduct of the elections and the civil forms of coming to terms with its results should not ignore the worrying signs of increased violence ahead of the elections. Those politically responsible among all social forces will face an enormous challenge to maintain peace and stability. The decisive factor in this will remain Swapo and its policy.

Ahead of the first independent general elections in November 1994, the then Prime Minister Hage Geingob presented the sensible view that a two third majority for his party, which held an absolute majority since the UN supervised elections, would not be a good ingredient for Namibian democracy. Since then, this high-ranking political office bearer had a career with ups and downs and a temporary withdrawal from Namibian politics. When demoted from the rank of Prime Minister he rather preferred to accept employment as a migrant worker at an African advocacy institution funded by the World Bank in Washington DC than to continue as a lower ranking minister. Since then he returned and made a remarkable comeback into Namibian politics. As Minister of Trade and Industry he also has been elected the Swapo vice president at the party congress in November 2007. This makes him the designated successor to the party's president and Head of State.

His track record includes a long service as highly paid United Nations official, when employed as the Director of the United Nations Institute for Namibia based in Lusaka between the mid-1970s and 1989. Upon returning from exile he was in charge of the election campaign for Swapo and played an influential role in the Constitutional Assembly as

the final step towards Independence. While Prime Minister, Geingob obtained a PhD from the University of Sheffield for a thesis on Namibia's constitutional process.

One could only note with surprise this seasoned politician's polemics during the final stages of the 2009 election campaign. Addressing a well attended political rally in the harbor town of Lüderitzbucht in mid-November he qualified opposition parties as "fake" and accused their leaders of suffering from a "Savimbi syndrome", to which he added: "the moment Savimbi died, there was peace in Angola".²⁵ Despite public criticism over this irresponsible outburst, he stated in similar fashion the weekend before the elections at a rally in the mining town of Tsumeb, that "international observers and 'cry babies' should not describe the final victory of his party during the forthcoming elections as undemocratic and intolerant towards opposition parties".²⁶

Given such dissonances, clearly out of tune of any songs by a choir with multiple voices, which would symbolize a democratic notion and spirit, it should come as no surprise that the rank and file in their eagerness copy such fanatic rhetoric. A triumphant (if not sycophantic) article published both in the state owned daily newspaper as well as on the Swapo website confidently ended with the columnist's "safely claim that Namibia, SWAPO Party and Sam Nujoma are one".²⁷ If this sets the tone for the "peaceful, tolerant and democratic society governed by the rule of law" which the Founding Father of the Republic of Namibia is credited for by his party, then it seems to abide not well for all those, who do not share the same ideals.

As if to make the point, the results of the elections in the Namibian mission to the United Nations (which produced a slight majority of votes for the RDP) prompted a hysterical tribunal, which turned Namibia's permanent representative into the target. Being suspected as a RDP supporter earlier on, he was disqualified as a "hibernator" and held personally responsible for the result, which was announced prior to the elections in Namibia herself. In a press conference, the leaders of the Swapo Youth League and the Swapo affiliated National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) stated among others: "Namibia under SWAPO Party Government can proudly teach America, Europe, Asia, SADC and Africa the meaning of National reconciliation, democracy, peace, stability and how to hold peaceful and democratic elections. (...) Poor and disappointing performance must be compensated by a recall and subsequent release from duties. We mean it, because the high commissioners are not diplomatic tourists in those countries but were supposed to represent the President of Namibia with uniform loyalty and not divided allegiance. (...) The

²⁵ Luqman Cloete, 'Don't Waste Votes On losers'. In: The Namibian, 17 November 2009; and Catherine Sasman, Come back to Swapo – Geingob. In: New Era, 19 November 2009.

²⁶ Special correspondent, Swapo gunning for outright win. In: New Era, 25 November 2009.

²⁷ Udo W. Froese, Africa: The Other Side of the Coin. Namibia, SWAPO Party and Sam Nujoma are One! In: New Era, 4 December 2009. Also accessible at: http://www.swapoparty.org/africa_the_other_side_of_the_coin.html.

SWAPO Party must urgently set up a Deployment Policy on the basis of which cadres will be deployed in the Government, its agencies and its SOEs and hold accountable on their performance and recalled for non-performance. If laws prevent this from happening, we cannot be held back by laws we can change, as simple as that. (...) We shall defend the gains of the liberation struggle through the ballot box. Those saboteurs and political cry babies who are masquerading as democrats are political failures on the string of neo-imperialists.”²⁸

In the spirit of victory, the following statement was published on the Swapo home page’s blog: “we are all democrats and therefore we must know that democracy means hardship to our people. Please no mercy to hibernators let them learn a lesson ... to feel the pinch of the Namibian majority, enough is enough comrades”.²⁹ And a like-minded patriot posted in a similar vein: “We in Swapo party wants to let those hibernators know that defecting Swapo is defecting the nation. Swapo is the Nation and the Nations of Namibia are Swapo.”³⁰ This self-righteousness finds its roots in the days during the mid-1970s, when Swapo in its efforts to bring Independence to the people of Namibia was recognized in a resolution adopted by the majority of members to the United Nations General Assembly as “the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people”. Only that self-determination should mean something different than the equation, which was then a political statement in support of the struggle for Independence. A struggle, which for many acting on behalf of or in solidarity with the colonized majority was by implication assumed to be one for democracy too.

In modification of a saying, one needs to remember, however, that reality lies in the eyes of the beholder. Strikingly, and in contrast to all the critical observations presented above, the latest Afrobarometer survey undertaken at the end of 2008 had the insight to offer that Namibians “are among the most satisfied populations in African democracies in terms of how democracy works in the country”.³¹

²⁸ Elijah Ngurare/Evalistus Kaaronda, SWAPO-SPYL, NUNW rap hibernators. Accessible at http://www.swapoparty.org/spyl_nunw_rap_hibernators.html.

²⁹ Posted by Cde Kanamutenya, 2 December 2009, <http://www.swapoparty.org/>.

³⁰ Posted by Kapitaholo Otati, 11 December 2009, <http://www.swapoparty.org/>.

³¹ Afrobarometer, The State of Democratic Consolidation..., op. cit. (note 23), p. 9.