

Geingob 2.0

Namibia's new government

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Abstract

The National Assembly and Presidential election results of 27 November 2019 suggest a turning point in Namibia's democracy. For the first time since the UN-supervised elections prior to Independence in 1990, the dominant party and its presidential candidate lost votes. Despite remaining firmly in political power, the emergence of new political actors has modified the political contestations with possibly lasting impacts. This analysis recapitulates the trends and considers some of the contributing factors to the new constellation in the political sphere. It explores the implications and consequences for President Hage Geingob's second term in office and has a closer look at the new Cabinet and related governance structures.

Introduction

The South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO of Namibia), has since Independence in 1990 been firmly in political control over the country. It has so far remained the top performer among the liberation movements as governments in the region, measured in voters' support in elections. "One Namibia, one nation" and "SWAPO is the nation and the nation is SWAPO" as earlier struggle slogans translated in the false equation that the party is the government and the government is the state.

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In November 1989 the first democratic elections for a Constituent Assembly took place under supervision of the United Nations. SWAPO secured the mandate to constitute the first government of the Republic of Namibia, proclaimed on 21 March 1990. The anticolonial movement subsequently transformed into Swapo Party.¹ It has on national as well as regional and communal levels considerably expanded its dominance since then, as the overview on election results for the National Assembly until 2014 documents (see Table 1).

Table 1: Parliamentary Election Results 1989-2014 for the Bigger Parties²

Party	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
SWAPO	384.567 56,90%	361.800 73,89%	408.174 76,15%	620.609 75,83%	602.580 74,29%	715.026 80,01%
DTA*	191.532 28,34%	101.748 20,78%	50.824 9,48%	42.070 5,14%	25.393 3,13%	42.933 4,80%
UDF**	37.874 5,60%	13.309 2,72%	15.685 2,93%	30.355 3,71%	19.489 2,40%	18.945 2,12%
CoD***	- -	- -	53.289 9,94%	59.464 7,27%	5.375 0,66%	3.402 0,38%
RDP****	- -	- -	- -	- -	90.556 11,16%	31.372 3,51%

* Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, renamed into Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) in 2017.

** United Democratic Front

*** Congress of Democrats (founded in 1999)

**** Rally for Democracy and Progress (founded in 2007)

Parallel to the party vote for the National Assembly voters also elect since 1994 by separate ballot paper directly the country's head of state.³ With less presidential candidates than opposition parties, SWAPO's candidate in each of the elections garnered more votes than the political organisation, thereby showing a high degree of identification with both the political organisation and its candidate nominated for president (see Table 2).

¹ SWAPO and Swapo as well as Swapo Party remain in use. In this article, except otherwise quoted, reference remains to SWAPO.

² Based on official figures released by the Electoral Commission as compiled in *Celebrating 25 years of democratic elections*. Supplement to the newspapers *Republikein*, *Namibia Sun* and *Allgemeine Zeitung*, Namibia Media Holdings, Windhoek, December 2014, 10-11. The elections of 1989 were for the Constituent Assembly, subsequently transformed into the National Assembly.

³ Sam Nujoma was appointed as the country's first President by the members of the Constituent Assembly. This was used as formal argument why he would merit a third term in office based on the country's first constitutional amendment, since it was only the second term for which being directly elected by ordinary vote from the electorate.

Table 2: Results for SWAPO Candidates in Presidential Elections 1994-2014⁴

	<i>1994</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2014</i>
SWAPO	73.89%	76.15%	75.83%	75.27%	80.01%
Nujoma	74.46%	76.85%	-	-	-
Pohamba	-	-	76.44%	76.42%	-
Geingob	-	-	-	-	86.73%

As these figures document, the political hegemony had been firmly in place for 30 years. SWAPO's patriotic narrative remained rooted in the official discourse perpetuating a political culture anchored in the "struggle days". But the electorate had gradually changed composition over time. The "born free" have emerged as a relevant factor, while the party displayed a growing gerontocratic structure. Its higher-ranking political office bearers remained with few exceptions legitimized by (predominantly exile-based) "struggle credentials", though the first generation is increasingly replaced by the second struggle generation.⁵ Among mainly members of the younger generation, this gradual (albeit reluctant) generational shift did not change the perception decisively. SWAPO became increasingly viewed at best as a club of middle-aged loyal and long-standing followers of an inner circle of old men, passing only limited responsibility to trustworthy cadres often guided by self-privileging motives, interests and agendas.

Such wear and tear of the party's political credibility was exacerbated by a number of financial scandals and embezzlements. A lack of delivery was reinforced by an economic crisis, which in combination with a drought caused tremendous economic harm during Geingob's first term in office. His grand Harambee Prosperity Plan announced with much fanfare during his first year as state president contrasted with a fiscal liquidity bottleneck leaving most of the promises unfulfilled. A recession since 2016 had devastating effects on the socio-economic realities. For respondents to an Afrobarometer survey undertaken in August 2019⁶ unemployment was the most important matter (54%). Drought (30%), poverty

⁴ Based on official figures released by the Electoral Commission as compiled in 'Celebrating 25 years of democratic elections' (fn. 2), 18.

⁵ Henning Melber, Daniela Kromrey, and Martin Welz, "Changing of the Guard? An Anatomy of Power Within SWAPO of Namibia", *African Affairs* 116(463), 2017: 284-310.

⁶ Survey Warehouse, *Namibians divided on land reform, including expropriation, Afrobarometer survey shows*. News release, 31 October 2019, 3. https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/press-release/Namibie/nam_r8_pr2_land_reform.pdf

(21%), education and water supply (20% each) followed. Corruption (16%), land (13%) and crime (11%) ranked surprisingly lower.⁷

The multi-dimensional crisis impacted on the day-to-day running of state affairs. It eroded the legitimacy of governance among a growing number of people. Increased appeals by President Geingob to national unity indicated that the “one Namibia one nation” mantra showed signs of fracture. “Unity in diversity” had moved further from reality than at any given time since Independence. Tirades in the social media but also in the newspapers by mainly a frustrated younger generation testified to an utter disrespect for those in power and displayed insulting language of hitherto unknown proportions. Centrifugal internal party-political dynamics along generational divides emerged in visible forms at the start of Geingob’s first term in office. Tensions escalated after protest activities of several leaders of the SWAPO Party Youth League (SPYL) in late 2014. As newly constituted Alternative Repositioning (AR) movement they symbolically occupied temporarily an erf in one of the new middle-class suburban areas of Windhoek to draw attention to the non-provision of land to urban squatters.⁸ Four leading SPYL officials, including its secretary general, were as a result of their activism expelled by the Politburo in July 2015.⁹ The four challenged the decision in court on the grounds of procedure.¹⁰ Based on the judicial ruling, they finally had to be re-admitted as members but were not re-instituted in their leadership positions.¹¹ Ever since then, their social activism at the grassroot level mobilised a growing number of the younger generation. The dissatisfaction with the official party politics resulted in first cases of campaigns in local by-elections by independent candidates challenging the SWAPO nominated candidate.¹² Given such shifting grounds, elections were for the first time widely expected to be more than business as usual.

When days ahead of the elections first reports broke the news of the latest and hitherto biggest known bribery case since Independence, Geingob claimed “media sabotage”¹³

⁷ Between then and the election three months later, however, three ministers resigned for being implicated in corrupt practices. Notably, none of them was dismissed, but all were allowed a face-saving exit and explicitly recognised even for their services in government.

⁸ See for more details Heike Becker, “Namibia’s Movement: Youth and Urban Land Activism”, *ROAPE* blog, posted 18 January 2016. <http://roape.net/2016/01/18/namibias-moment-youth-and-urban-land-activism/>

⁹ Insight Namibia, “SWAPO vs SWAPO Party Youth League: Ngurare in the firing line”, 17 July 2015. <http://insightnamibiainmagazine.blogspot.se/2015/07/swapos-politburo-and-ngurares.html>

¹⁰ New Era, “High court to hear Swapo expulsions”, 19 August 2015.

<https://www.newera.com.na/2015/08/19/high-court-hear-swapo-expulsions/>

¹¹ Tileni Mongudhi, “Swapo after the judgement”, *The Namibian*, 25 April 2016.

<https://www.namibian.com.na/150104/archive-read/Swapo-after-the-judgement>

¹² Placido Hilukilwa, “Independent candidate steals limelight in Ondangwa by-election”, *Informante*, 14 May 2019. <https://informante.web.na/independent-candidate-steals-limelight-in-ondangwa-by-election/>

¹³ Hileni Nembwaya, “Geingob claims media sabotage,” *The Namibian*, 18 November 2019.

deliberately undermining his credibility through “fake news”.¹⁴ The dealings involved the biggest Icelandic fishing company, two Namibian ministers and several other high-ranking officials in state institutions.¹⁵ The large-scale fraud had by then already made international headlines.¹⁶ Dubbed since then as *#Fishrot*, files disclosed massive illegal transactions bordering to state capture the Namibian way.¹⁷ A documentary broadcasted by Al Jazeera on 1 December¹⁸ disclosed further delicate details.¹⁹ The footage implicated also SWAPO as a likely beneficiary through donations to the party for the election campaign. Revelations further suggested that the lawyer serving the party and often also government and other state institutions (as well as Geingob as his personal client) might have acted as a facilitator in money laundering.²⁰ By mid-2020, six accused arrested since end of 2019 (including the two former ministers) were still in custody awaiting trial, while investigations continue. Their applications to be released on bail were so far denied.

The National Assembly elections

The final results, announced on 30 November, ended weeks of speculation. For a substantial number among the 820,000 (60.4%) of the 1.3 million registered voters who went to the ballot box (or rather the electronic voting machine) the honeymoon was over. While SWAPO lost the two-third majority it held since the elections in 1994 with the worst result since Independence, ten more political parties snatched enough votes to enter the next National Assembly. SWAPO remained the biggest party in all 14 regions of the country, but in some of them with less than 50% of the votes.

¹⁴ Kuzeeko Tjitemisa, “Presidency fumes at ‘fake’ media reports”, *New Era*, 22 November 2019.

<https://neweralive.na/posts/presidency-fumes-at-fake-media-reports>

¹⁵ Shinovene Immanuel and Sakeus Iikela, “Kickback Kings fall”, *The Namibian*, 15 November 2019.

<https://www.namibian.com.na/85501/read/Kickback-Kings-fall>

¹⁶ James Kleinfeld, “Two Namibian ministers resign following Al Jazeera investigation”, *Al Jazeera*, 14 November 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/namibian-ministers-resign-al-jazeera-investigation-191113161947877.html>

¹⁷ Since only after the elections the full dimensions of the scandal emerged in the public it remains a matter of speculation, if and to which extent these latest revelations of state capture like dimensions implicating a wide range of highest office bearers did have any immediate impact on the election results.

¹⁸ The 51-minute documentary “Anatomy of a Bribe” broadcasted by Al Jazeera Investigations (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ1TB0nwHs>) has by mid-December 2019 been accessed by close to 800,000 viewers.

¹⁹ James Kleinfeld, “Former Namibian ministers arrested in fisheries corruption scandal”, *Daily Maverick*, 2 December 2019. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-12-02-former-namibian-ministers-arrested-in-fisheries-corruption-scandal/>

²⁰ Maria Amakali, “Law society probes lawyers over Fishrot”, *New Era*, 16 December 2019. <https://neweralive.na/posts/law-society-probes-lawyers-over-fishrot>

Table 3: National Assembly Election Results 2019²¹

<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Seats</i>
SWAPO Party of Namibia (SWAPO)	536,861	65.5	63
Popular Democratic Movement (PDM)	136,576	16.6	16
Landless People's Movement (LPM)	38,956	4.7	4
National Unity Democratic Organization of Namibia (NUDO)	16,066	1.9	2
All People's Party (APP)	14,644	1.8	2
United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF)	14,644	1.8	2
Republican Party of Namibia (RP)	14,546	1.8	2
Namibian Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF)	13,580	1.7	2
Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP)	8,953	1.1	1
Christian Democratic Voice Party (CDV)	5,841	0.7	1
SWANU of Namibia (SWANU)	5,330	0.6	1
Congress of Democrats (CoD)	4,654	0.6	0
Namibian Democratic Party (NDP)	4,559	0.6	0
Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP)	3,212	0.4	0
Namibia Patriotic Front (NPF)	1,785	0.2	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>820,227</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>96</i>

As previous election results presented in the Tables 1 and 3 show with regard to the Congress of Democrats (CoD) and the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), new political parties, even when created by prominent SWAPO dissidents, failed to establish a sustainable alternative. They snatched votes from other opposition parties when campaigning for the first time, only to become irrelevant later on. This time, the new kid on the block is the Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM). It was founded after a fall out of the deputy minister of land Bernardus Swartbooi (previously the regional governor of the !Karas region) with his minister Utoni Nujoma and the wider party over the land policy²². Its home base is South of the Hardap region's centre Mariental in the sparsely populated !Karas region. Similar to some other existing parties it is rooted in a regional-ethnic stronghold, in this case of the Nama

²¹ Notemba Tjipueja, *Official Announcement of Final Election Results for the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections by ECN Chairperson, Adv. Notemba Tjipueja*, 30 November 2019, 6. <https://www.ecn.na/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Final-Election-Results-Announcement-Speech-ECN-Chair-30-Nov-2019.pdf>

²² Henning Melber, "Colonialism, Land, Ethnicity and Class: Namibia after the Second National Land Conference", *Africa Spectrum* 54(1), 2019: 77.

communities. With four seats LPM entered Parliament on 21 March 2020 as the third biggest party.

Hardly anticipated by most of the observers, the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) became the main beneficiary of the frustration among the electorate and retained its status as the official opposition with a resounding success. The party under president McHenry Venaani had a name change only during the legislative period in an effort to leave behind the association of being a pro-South African and predominantly white party, which already in the first elections campaigned as the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). It quadrupled its share from four to 16 seats. Five of the other parties secured two seats each. Three more managed to get one seat, to fill the total number of 96 Members of Parliament (MPs). Since the electoral system is strictly proportional, some 8,500 votes were enough to obtain a seat, while the last seats were snatched by those parties with even less votes.

In what borders to a dramatic decline, SWAPO is now left with 63 seats - one seat short of a two-third-majority, required for constitutional changes, the adoption of a state of emergency and related matters. It can of course continue to govern comfortably. But of less comfort is the punishment this testifies to by parts of its support base. The result also affected a number of loyal party cadres, who ranked lower on the electoral list. These included some cabinet members, deputy ministers and other struggle veterans. Given the strict adherence to the ranking on the party lists, they now fell by the wayside.

The Presidential elections

More challenging than the party competition became the direct election of Namibia's next president. In a surprise move, the SWAPO member Panduleni Itula registered as "independent" candidate, using a loophole in the country's electoral act. A former Youth League activist, in exile since the early 1980s in the UK, he returned as a dentist in 2013. His active party membership also included the role of a lecturer at the newly established SWAPO Party School. Questioning the party's electoral congress procedures to appoint Geingob as uncontested presidential candidate, he claimed to have the right to challenge the official party candidate as an alternative. Namibia's electoral act requires beyond certain minimalist formal criteria (such as citizenship, age and no prison sentence) only a limited number of signatures by supporters to allow registering for and campaigning in presidential elections. Political affiliations of the candidates are irrelevant. Itula therefore remained defiant to leave SWAPO, using the analogy of a family feud, which still allows to stay in the family while seeking

solutions.²³ SWAPO-internal factionalism and divide over the leadership issue seemed beyond personal animosities a significant factor triggering this rivalry. Interestingly, Itula never disclosed the sources funding his campaign and thereby fuelled speculations further. Significantly so and indicative of the rifts, Itula’s claim to remain a party member despite challenging the officially nominated candidate was a hotly contested matter of discussions among SWAPO members. According to the final results released (see Table 4), Itula did remarkably well.

Table 4: Presidential Election Results 2019²⁴

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>
Dr. Hage Gottfried Geingob (SWAPO)	464,703	56.3
Dr. Panduleni Filemon Bango Itula (Independent)	242,657	29.4
Hon. McHenry Venaani (PDM)	43,959	5.3
Mr. Bernardus Clinton Swartbooi (LPM)	22,542	2.7
Hon. Apius Auchab (UDF)	22,115	2.7
Ms. Esther Utjiua Muinjangu (NUDO)	12,039	1.5
Hon. Dr. Tangeni Iijambo (SWANU)	5,959	0.7
Mr. Henry Ferdinand Mudge (RP)	4,379	0.5
Hon. Mike Ratoveni Kavekatora (RDP)	3,515	0.4
Hon. Shixwameni Ignatius Nkotongo (APP)	3,304	0.4
Mr. Epafra Jan Mukwilongo (NEFF)	1,026	0.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>826,198</i>	<i>100</i>

In the two regions with the highest degree of urbanisation (Khomas and Erongo) Itula even received with close to 50% most votes. In the end, his 29.4% compared to Geingob’s 56.3%. bordered to a humiliation for the latter, who could orchestrate his campaign based on the party assets. Despite such comparative advantage, he was not only the first presidential candidate who scored less votes than the party, but lost about a third of the electorate which gave him the confidence and trust five years ago to his rival. While it was widely suspected that Itula represented a party faction mainly originating from the Northern O-regions opposing “Team Hage”, however, Geingob maintained the highest percentage of votes in the

²³ The Patriot, “‘I will take the confusion out of them’ – Panduleni Ituna”, 21 November, 2019. <https://thepatriot.com.na/index.php/2019/11/21/i-will-take-the-confusion-out-of-them-panduleni-itula/>

²⁴ Tjipueja, 5.

northern regions, believed to be the home to an anti-Geingob party faction. Notably also, the votes of Geingob and Itula added up to Geingob's score in 2014.

In marked contrast to PDM's National Assembly success, its presidential candidate Venaani received less votes than in 2014, while the new candidate Swartbooi came in fourth place. This suggests that the PDM as a party benefitted from protest voters in support of Itula, who were unwilling to vote for SWAPO with Geingob as candidate. Esther Muinjangu became the first female candidate entering the competition.²⁵ She had during the year been elected as the new president of the National Unity Democratic Organization of Namibia (NUDO) – an ethnical based party with the stronghold in parts of the Ovaherero community. A lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University of Namibia, she had a high profile as chairperson of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation (OGF). For years she campaigned also internationally for the recognition of the genocide committed during German colonialism in 1904-1908 and the demands for reparations by the Ovaherero and Nama communities who were excluded from the official German-Namibian bilateral negotiations.

Post-electoral disputes

While Itula continued to dismiss any demands for resignation from SWAPO, he disputed the outcome of the presidential elections. Together with some other presidential candidates he submitted objections to the country's Supreme Court.²⁶ They demanded a re-run of the presidential elections with the main argument that the continued use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) without voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) was in violation of the constitutional principles.²⁷ In 2014 Namibia had introduced as the first African country EVMs. But the 2014 Namibian Electoral Act required a simultaneous introduction of a VVPAT to ensure direct control by the individual voters that their votes were registered correctly. Despite such legal provision in clause 97(3) of the Act²⁸, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) made use of EVMs without VVPAT, since the Electoral Act allowed a transitional period for implementing different provisions of the Act becoming operational. In

²⁵ Job Shipululo Amupanda and Ralph Marenga, "The ascendancy of Esther Utjiua Muinjangu to the NUDO presidency in Namibia: A challenge to patriarchy?" *Journal of Namibian Studies* 26, 2019: 73-91.

²⁶ Arlana Shikongo and Sakeus Iikela, "Itula throws legal challenge at ECN", *The Namibian*, 5 December 2019. <https://www.namibian.com.na/86169/read/Itula-throws-legal-challenge-at-ECN>.

²⁷ Kuzeeko Tjitemisa, "Itula and co head to Supreme Court ... five presidential candidates challenge poll outcome", *New Era*, 13 December 2019. <https://neweralive.na/posts/itula-and-co-head-to-supreme-court-five-presidential-candidates-challenge-poll-outcome>.

²⁸ Nangula Shejvali, *Technology in the 2019 Namibian Elections*. IPPR Democracy Report, Namibia Votes 2019 No. 2. Windhoek, Institute of Public Policy Research, 2019: 11.

addition, upon instruction of the then Minister of Urban and Rural Development, Charles Namoloh, the requirement for a paper trail was subsequently put aside. Concerns and legal objections by some opposition parties prior to the elections in November 2014 were dismissed by court. In mid-2018 the ECN started negotiating with the Indian supply company Bharat Electronics Limited to place bulk orders for VVPAT-enabled EVMs.²⁹ But in response to queries raised ahead of the elections, the ECN explained that the Indian supplier could not provide the required technology for an upgrade. It then proceeded to conduct the elections with the EVMs without a paper trail.

On 17 January the Supreme Court heard the arguments. The claimants maintained that it was beyond the power of the minister to put aside the obligation of a verifiable paper trail as part of the 2014 Electoral Act and that he therefore violated the constitutional limits of his authority in bypassing the lawmakers. Therefore, the results of the presidential elections should be set aside and the election repeated.³⁰ Notably, no similar claim was brought forward as regarded the National Assembly elections, which were conducted in the same way.³¹ On 5 February, the full bench of the Supreme Court announced its unanimous decision. It ruled that minister Nangoloh's order "violated the separation of powers doctrine in that the minister usurped the legislative powers of the National Assembly".³² But the court found the claimants argument of gross irregularities unconvincing and lacking sufficient evidence, which would be proof that the absence of a paper trail affected the election results to an extent which would invalidate them. It therefore did not revoke the elections. Instead, it declared that elections would require as from 21 March 2020 full compliance with the Electoral Act's section 97 or EVMs not being implemented until they are equipped with a VVAPT. In response, Itula filed on 11 February an objection to the ruling. But on 4 March the registrar of the Supreme Court confirmed that the proceedings were finalised and that the judgement of 5 February was binding.³³

²⁹ Nikhil Agarwal, "Opposition wants paper ballots but Namibia wants Indian VVPAT-linked EVMs", *livemint*, 11 August 2018. <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/vAyO4uvMFwoS500bDGf4ZP/Opposition-wants-paper-ballots-but-Namibia-wants-Indian-VVPA.html>

³⁰ Sakeus Likela and Werner Menges, "Court weighs up election rerun", *The Namibian*, 20 January 2020. <https://www.namibian.com.na/197103/archive-read/Court-weighs-up-election-rerun>

³¹ This could have led to the rather absurd situation, that while the Presidential elections might be declared null and void and to be repeated, the parallel National Assembly elections would have remained valid, despite using the very same modus operandi.

³² John Nakuta, "The 2019 Presidential Election Supreme Court Decision: Splitting The Baby In Half?", *The Namibian*, 14 February 2020. <https://www.namibian.com.na/198062/archive-read/The-2019-Presidential-Election-Supreme-Court>

³³ Werner Menges, "Itula's case finalised, Supreme Court says", *The Namibian*, 5 March 2020. <https://www.namibian.com.na/198764/archive-read/Itulas-case-finalised-Supreme-Court-says>

This cleared the way for Hage Geingob as re-elected president of Namibia to enter preparations for the second term in office, for which he took the oath on 21 March (Independence Day). As another so far final act in the Itula drama, SWAPO announced on 20 March that he had been expelled from the party.³⁴ As he declared towards the end of April, he will follow the wish of his support base to turn the “Dr Itula phenomenon for change” into a new political party.³⁵ This promises that there will be more to come.

The new government

In a first statement after the release of the official election results, Geingob declared: “Your votes have sent a message and I have heard you”. He reiterated that “a new chapter has been opened with regard to the Namibian political landscape”.³⁶ Reportedly, in a SWAPO central committee meeting held before the Christmas holiday season started, issues discussed included factionalism, dysfunctional relationships and personal disputes in the party as contributing factors resulting in the Itula campaign.³⁷ This could be seen as an indirect confirmation that Itula could by no means be reduced to an obscure troublemaker or “unguided missile”, a maverick operating purely based on his individual grudge against the dominant party faction as personified in “Team Hage”.

When opening the first cabinet meeting in the new year, Geingob followed a practice he introduced at the first term in office by allocating each calendar year a programmatic label. As he announced: “to give effect to the mandate of the people, and in line with the custom which I have established to provide general guidance on the agenda, tone and direction of the work of Government Ministries, Offices and Agencies, as well as the Namibian population, I have befittingly themed the Year 2020, as ‘The Year of INTROSPECTION’.”³⁸ At a new year’s reception for members of the diplomatic corps he explained, that this underlines the

³⁴ Sakeus Likela, “Swapo expels Itula from party”, *The Namibian*, 20 March 2020. <https://www.namibian.com.na/199359/archive-read/Swapo-expels-Itula-from-party>

³⁵ Sakeus Likela, “Itula party on the cards”, *The Namibian*, 29 April 2020. <https://www.namibian.com.na/90652/read/Itula-party-on-the-cards>

³⁶ Hage Geingob, *Speech by His Excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia and the SWAPO Party, following victory in the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections*. Windhoek, 2 December 2019, 4 and 6.

<http://www.swapoparty.org/speech-by-his-excellency-dr-hage-geingob-president-of-the-republic-of-namibia-and-the-swapo-party-following-victory-in-the-2019-presidential-and-national-assembly-elections.html>

³⁷ Jemima Beukes, “Swapo introspects”, *Namibian Sun*, 17 December 2019. <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/swapo-introspects2019-12-17>.

³⁸ Hage Geingob, *Statement by his Excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, at the opening of the 1st cabinet meeting*, Windhoek, February 4, 2020 (capitals in the original), 6. <http://www.gov.na/documents/10181/985403/2020+cabinet+opening.pdf/baf2701c-8117-46e6-9e07-e600e725c0fc>

aim to “undergo extensive soul-searching”.³⁹ In a first step, Geingob re-appointed on 18 March his top three team of Deputy President (Nangolo Mbumba), Prime Minister (Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila) and Deputy Prime Minister (Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, at the same time Minister of International Relations and Cooperation). They were loyal supporters throughout his first term in office and remain the backbone.⁴⁰

Assumptions that such “playing safe” signals more continuity than change, were however partially wrong. Rather, it seems that a reliable point of departure was created as a kind of safety net, allowing also for some infusion of fresh blood, thereby entering less known territory. This became obvious with Geingob’s choices of the eight MPs appointed by him without voting rights on 22 March. With Veikko Nekundi (former Deputy Minister of Public Enterprises) and Dr Kalumbi Shangula (former Minister of Health) only two previous lawmakers were brought back. The six newcomers to parliament were the Law Reform and Development Commission Director Yvonne Dausab, the Executive Director of the Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Service Emma Kantema-Gaomas, the former Deputy Chairperson of the Children's Parliament Emma Theofilus, the former Chief Regional Officer for the Erongo Region Natalia Goagoses, the Bank of Namibia Governor Ipumbu Shiimi and Rear Admiral Peter Hafeni Vilho. All of them were much younger than the veterans now heading for retirement. Four of them were made ministers: Dausab for Justice, Shangula for Health and Social Services, Shiimi for Finance and Vilho for Defence and Veteran Affairs. Three of the four others became deputy ministers: Kantema-Gaomas for Sport, Youth and National Service, Theofilus for Information and Communication Technology, and Nekundi for Works and Transport. The 23-year old Theofilus, who graduated from the University of Namibia in law, became the youngest MP in the whole of SADC. This clearly signalled the intention to counteract the image of a gerontocratic party. Like almost all others, she had during the initial weeks in office no opportunities to show her skills in public. Due to the lockdown under the Covid-19 and the declaration of a state of emergency on 17 March, political life as much as public affairs were restricted to a bare minimum and maintained a low profile.

³⁹ Hage Geingob, *Statement by his Excellency Dr Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia at the new year greetings to the diplomatic corps*. Windhoek, February 21, 2020, 8. <http://www.op.gov.na/documents/84084/986732/Speech+by+President+Geingob+at+the+New+Years+Greeting+s.pdf/a367bad2-6ad6-4728-b016-f9204162ccc7>

⁴⁰ This constellation also fuels already existing speculations further, if the two women might not be potential aspirants for the competition to succeed Geingob both as party president and as head of state, given that Nangolo Mbumba has almost on the day the same age as Geingob and they both end the term 84 years of age.

After his swearing in on 21 March, Geingob also followed his earlier promise to downsize his Cabinet for the second term in office, though not as rigorous as it could have been expected. After some mergers, reorganisations and the redefinition and renaming of portfolios, he announced on 22 March a new Cabinet. The previously 24 ministries were reduced to 21, and the 28 deputy ministers to 17.⁴¹ Disappointment over inconsistencies was voiced by the Institute for Public Policy Research, which commented:

Why for example, is a deputy Minister required for the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology but not for a major ministry like Finance? It is hard to escape the conclusion that Cabinet appointments are primarily a game of musical chairs designed to keep party favourites employed rather than get things done.⁴²

It came as a surprise to many that the Bank of Namibia's governor Ipumbu Shiimi replaced Calle Schlettwein, who was transferred to a new consolidated Ministry of Agriculture, Water, and Land Reform. While Shiimi is a trained economist⁴³, Schlettwein had graduated in zoology/botany and then entomology at the University of Stellenbosch. His appointment was welcomed by stakeholders in the commercial agricultural sector.⁴⁴ It is not without a certain degree of irony, that the only Namibian in Cabinet from the German-speaking minority is now tasked with the thorny and sensitive issue of land reform. In another surprise move, Geingob replaced Shiimi as governor of the Bank of Namibia with 64-year old Johannes !Gawaxab for the 18 months of Shiimi's remaining term in office at the Bank. !Gawaxab is considered a friend of Geingob and has since the early 1980s been in a variety of positions an influential player in the private financial sector. This was considered as a potential conflict of interests. Together with his at times dubious role in decision-making processes it provoked some mixed reactions.⁴⁵

Last but not least, when announcing Cabinet, Geingob's appointment of Esther Muinjangué as deputy minister of Health and Social Services came as the biggest surprise. Her professional background certainly qualified her for such an assignment, and she used during the Corona-crisis her competences already visibly for a public role in the new position. But it

⁴¹ For a full list with details see IPPR, *Namibia Quarterly Economic Review*, January-March 2020. Windhoek: Institute for Public Policy Research 2020, 1-3. <https://ippr.org.na/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Namibia-QER-Q1-2020-5.pdf>

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴³ He started his career as a junior researcher in the mid-1990s at the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU). For a detailed comment on the new Cabinet appointments see Shinovene Immanuel, "Stressful job but worth it – Schlettwein", *The Namibian*, 23 March 2020. <https://www.namibian.com.na/199377/archive-read/Stressful-job-but-worth-it---Schlettwein>

⁴⁴ Kuzeeko Tjitemisa, "Agri sector welcomes Schlettwein", *New Era*, 24 March 2020. <https://neweralive.na/posts/agri-sector-welcomes-schlettwein>

⁴⁵ Shinovene Immanuel, Lazarus Amukeshe and Nghinomenwa Erastus, "!Gawaxab's new job raises eyebrows", *The Namibian*, 22 April 2020. <https://www.namibian.com.na/200321/archive-read/Gawaxabs-new-job-raises-eyebrows>

contrasted with her earlier critical stance on the Namibian-German bilateral negotiations over the genocide in the former German colony. Both the Nama Traditional Leaders Association and the Ovaherero Traditional Authority reacted with consternation to the announcement and recalled her as chairperson of the OGF.⁴⁶ Her party however confirmed that the appointment had been discussed and was endorsed by the leadership prior to the announcement.

With the loss of a two-third-majority for the first time since 1995, this returns to a practice during the first legislative term following Independence, when President Nujoma also had appointed members of other parties to governing positions. – Time will tell, if the two seats of NUDO are required for SWAPO to secure a two-third majority, and how this constellation will then play out. This makes the scenario different from 1990-1995, when SWAPO would have required either the votes of the official opposition party DTA or several smaller parties to garner a two-third-majority. It now would be a matter for NUDO alone, with a deputy minister in government ranks. The party leadership has expressed full confidence in its president to remain loyal to opposition politics, which NUDO claims to still stand for. In any case: if recalled from parliament by her party, Muinjangue would also disqualify as a member of Cabinet. That NUDO politics are currently controversial among the Ovaherero electoral basis documented a massive feud between the paramount chief Vekuii Rukoro of the OTA with one of his earlier confidantes, the former NUDO-MP Arnold Tjihuike, during which dirty linen were washed in the public domain.⁴⁷

Conclusion: Namibia's state of democratic governance

At the start of the country's seventh five-year legislature period since Independence in 1990, Namibia's lawmakers entered a precarious setting and face an uphill battle. Drought and recession have during the last years created a much more vulnerable socio-economic environment, and large-scale corruption scandals have added to the growing frustration among the electorate. The rather stable social contract has become far more fragile and contested. The devastating effect of the Covid-19 pandemic adds immense pressure. Tabling

⁴⁶ Jemima Beukes, "'Conflicted' Muinjangue removed from genocide role", *Namibian Sun*, 31 March 2020. <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/conflicted-muinjangue-removed-from-genocide-role2020-03-31>

⁴⁷ Kuzeeko Tjitemisa, "Rukoro, Tjihuike cross swords over Muinjangue appointment", *New Era*, 5 May 2020. <https://neweralive.na/posts/rukoro-tjihuike-cross-swords-over-muinjangue-appointment>; Jemima Beukes, "Rukoro explains N\$100k donation to Geingob", *Namibian Sun*, 12 May 2020. <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/rukoro-explains-n100k-donation-to-geingob-campaign2020-05-11>; Jemima Beukes, "Tjihuike fined cattle for 'lies'", *Namibian Sun*, 19 May 2020. <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/tjihuike-fined-cattle-for-lies2020-05-18>

his first budget on 27 May, finance minister Shiimi could not be envied. The economy is shrinking further and projected to contract by 6.6% during the year. Public debt, which was estimated at 54.8% for the last financial year, will rise in an unprecedented way to 68.7% of GDP or N\$ 117.5 billion. The annual budget tabled amounted to N\$ 64.3 billion with additional N\$ 8.4 billion earmarked for debt services.⁴⁸ The continued contraction of the economy will add to growing unemployment. Namibia was applauded by observers for its crisis management and in particular the immediate measures to ease the social misery triggered by the lockdown through a N\$ 750 grant to those in need – euphemistically labelled as low income groups (though as it emerged not all who would have been entitled were among the beneficiaries). This might have for a limited period eased the pressure slightly, but it will not solve the immense problems when it comes to the growing poverty and the frustration which grows along. The budget allocations, however, follow much the philosophy of “business as usual” even in those very unusual times.

Meanwhile, the summary of results of the latest Afrobarometer Survey should serve those who govern even more as an eye opener and awakening call than the election results of late November. 80.6% think the country is going in the wrong direction. 72.6% describe the present economic condition as very or fairly bad. 58.2% believe the economic conditions are worse or much worse than a year before, while 47.3% expect them to become even worse or much worse in 12 months’ time. But the good news is, that there remains a resilience to authoritarian tendencies. Only 12.9% of respondents approve or strongly approve of a one-party-state, while 16.5% approve or strongly approve that the army governs, and 11.4% that the president rules without elections and a parliament. 56.3% consider democracy preferable to any other kind of government, 63% find it more important for citizens to hold government accountable, even if this would slow down decision-making, and 71.9% are in favour of a constitutional two-term limit for the office of president. 43.7% are however not very or not at all satisfied how democracy works in Namibia, and 52.3% believe people have often or always be careful of what they say about politics. Strikingly and as a worrying sign, 43.8% agree that the government should be able to ban any organisation that goes against its policies.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ogone Tlhage, “Govt debt rises to N\$117bn”, *Namibian Sun*, 28 May 2020.
<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/govt-debt-rises-to-n117bn2020-05-27/>

⁴⁹ Survey Warehouse, *Summary of results. Afrobarometer Round 8 survey in Namibia, 2019*. Windhoek: Survey Warehouse 2019.

Significantly was also the erosion in political trust. Those who trust the country's president dropped from 81% in 2014 to 60% in 2019. The trust in the National Assembly was with 46% the lowest since the first survey in 1999 (when it stood at 48%, peaked in 2012 and 2014 at 74% and declined to 47% in 2017). A decline in trust was also registered for the army (from 74% in 2012 to 61% in 2019), the police (from 76% in 2012 to 60% in 2019) and the courts of law (from 75% in 2012 to 54% in 2019). And while in 2014 still 74% trusted the electoral commission, this dropped to 54% in 2019.⁵⁰

As the election results show, this erosion of trust in state institutions has also weakened SWAPO, but even more so its presidential candidate. Geingob, who in 2014 still recorded the top result of all presidential elections until then, is now the first who garnered less votes than the party. It does not help him that he feels offended by “ungrateful Namibians” and claims – as he did when entering his second term – that he would be praised outside the country “for the progress he made in fighting poverty, inequality and corruption despite taking over a ‘broke’ country”.⁵¹ – A remark, which provoked scathing attacks. After all. Geingob in concert with his finance minister and others always claimed that Namibia's fiscal and economic situation is sound and that there is nothing to be worried about. In his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) in his second – and as he stressed last - term as resident of the Republic of Namibia, he was clearly scaling down the declared ambitions when declaring: “I remain confident that with sufficient resources and concerted efforts, Namibia can one day achieve the goal of a more equal society”.⁵² While these are signs of the dented ego and a less confident attitude of the job incumbent, his decline in popularity might also weaken his party-internal authority and influence the decision-making process over his succession closer to the next elections.

Similarly, Itula has set an example for elections on forthcoming local and regional government levels. The former SPYL leader and grass root activist Job Amupanda from the AR movement has already announced that he will campaign for mayor in the Windhoek municipality elections. More such centrifugal tendencies might emerge as long as the SWAPO leadership remains an “old men's” club (with a few elderly women at their side).

⁵⁰ Survey Warehouse, *Trust in political institutions is on the decline in Namibia, Afrobarometer survey shows*. News release, 23 March 2020. <http://www.afrobarometer.org/press/trust-political-institutions-decline-namibia-afrobarometer-survey-shows>

⁵¹ Sakeus Likela, “President wants to be assessed by foreigners”, *The Namibian*, 19 March 2020.

<https://www.namibian.com.na/199285/archive-read/President-wants-to-be-assessed-by-foreigners>

⁵² Hage Geingob, *State of the Nation Address by His Excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia*, Windhoek, June 4, 2020, 6.

http://www.op.gov.na/documents/84084/1079375/President+Hage+G.+Geingob_State+of+the+Nation+Address_2020.pdf/332cbc2d-4759-4bcf-a77f-828dbc1db36e

They view the younger generation and some of the radical criticism as a nuisance and threat. Speaking at a press conference on occasion of a meeting of the Southern Africa Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation in Windhoek, the Inspector-General of Namibia's police Sebastian Ndeitunga warned of "the phenomena of radicalisation of the youth in our region who are singing the song of regime change".⁵³ It is another sign of the increasing trends of securitisation in policies, which has already become manifest in the controversial deployment of soldiers to support police in fighting crime in operations which were started at Christmas 2018. It will be interesting to see, to which extent the new Cabinet appointed by Geingob will be able to counteract such tendencies through the active role played by newcomers. As concluded after observing the 2014 elections:

A growing number of young people ... have never felt part of the moral order and are increasingly marginalised by its power relations. The big question for liberation movements in power in Southern Africa in this situation is not so much whether they will be re-elected in the next election, or the one after. The question is whether they will be able to integrate such people into the social contract, and what will happen if they fail to do so.⁵⁴

As for SWAPO, a moral-ethical renewal is a precondition to regain lost credibility. The motto of the liberation movement, maintained as party, has been "solidarity, freedom, justice". If no political will and initiatives to follow such values will be visible soon, the decline might continue. Many among the people had enough of promises without delivery. They expect good governance more than continued heroic struggle narratives, while "a luta continua" translates into "the looting continues". A sobering stock taking of recent governance reinforced this message by bemoaning "the near-absence of any form of virtue ethics in character and actions".⁵⁵

Namibia's political stability has so far been vested in the dominance of SWAPO in a de facto one-party-state. Those opposing such hegemony were scattered and inefficient, mainly occupied with in-fights and foremost interested in their own individual gains. Opposition politics hardly deserved the name. Parties lacked alternative political programmes and mainly followed their ethnic-regional particularistic courses.⁵⁶ This might have a partial reason in the

⁵³ NAMPA, "Radical youth a threat – Ndeitunga", *Namibian Sun*, 12 February 2020. <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/radical-youth-a-threat-ndeitunga2020-02-12>

⁵⁴ Gregor Dobler, "Waiting and voting in the village: Election Day 2014 in Odibo, Namibia", *Journal of Namibian Studies* 26, 2019: 25

⁵⁵ André Du Pisani, "Namibia At 30: Ready to Depart?", *The Namibian*, 6 March 2020.

<https://www.namibian.com.na/198825/archive-read/Namibia-At-30-Ready-to-Depart-ANDRÉ-DU>

⁵⁶ Notably, with the exception of the LPM, hardly any other opposition party campaigned with a clear political programme. Media were complaining that in the absence of any relevant documents the party programmes could not be presented nor discussed. Even SWAPO only released an improvised fragment a few days ahead of the

assumption, that so far voters have hardly ever based their decisions on a published party programme but rather follow other determinants in their political preferences. But one could also conclude that independent of such considerations the old adage applies, that with enemies like these, SWAPO did not need any friends.

This might change for the first time, with a strong PDM opposition and a new LPM. Together they already have about the same number of seats the total opposition occupied before. The newly elected 33 MPs from ten parties (including NUDO) will have to make up their mind if they use the new strength to form any meaningful counter weight. Among their MPs are a number of “born free”. This could encourage the formation of alliances to shape new discourses and enhance visibility during parliamentary debates. Already the swearing in was used as a platform by the hot-tempered LPM president Bernardus Swartbooï to hurl insults at SWAPO MPs. Shortly thereafter, the first new interactions between him and minister Utoni Nujoma (now demoted from the abandoned Ministry for Land Reform to Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, which despite its relevance has usually been a dumping ground) was almost erupting into a physical fight. Such eruptions promise to make parliamentary debates lively, less boring and more entertaining. They have now even enriched the civil law cases.⁵⁷ But it remains to be seen if beyond the personal animosities this also adds political substance. The debate following the 2020 SONA⁵⁸ could at best provide some mixed feelings. Many observers were inclined to consider it mainly as another waste of time, with an opposition voicing protest and managing to interrupt by provoking some rather undignified altercations but seemingly ill-prepared and lacking again coherent and convincing alternative policies. There were however a few glimmers of hope when towards the end Bernardus Swartbooï and Hage Geingob created an atmosphere of mutual respect and productive exchange, leaving behind some of the personal animosities for the sake of common policy concerns. If this would become more the order of the day, the winner might be democracy and good governance. Both are in urgent demand and would benefit not

elections hardly accessible by those interested, which much to the dismay of some members of the Central Committee and the Politburo was not even discussed and endorsed by the party’s governing bodies. It was the presidential candidate Itula, who had the only coherent and detailed political programme for wider distribution, in which he presented clear alternatives to the SWAPO governance and policy and also made his own policy understanding and practice transparent.

⁵⁷ Kuzeeko Tjitemisa, “Nujoma demands Swartbooï apology”, *New Era*, 1 June 2020.

<https://neweralive.na/posts/nujoma-demands-swartbooï-apology>

⁵⁸ The delivery of the SONA and the subsequent debate can be followed for over four-and-a-half hours at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAmroYDNgLE>.

only the political culture and the legitimacy of political players, but even more so the ordinary people anxiously hoping for better times.

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