



## Spot the difference: Political party platforms compared

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This study examines the ideological histories of the nine registered political parties in Namibia and then compares and contrasts their political manifestos and other party publications across a wide range of social, economic and political issues.

In looking at party ideologies it becomes clear that the liberation struggle – which resulted in South West Africa (SWA) gaining independence on 21 March 1990 and becoming the sovereign state of Namibia – shaped the identities and political beliefs of the political parties. Since independence, the parties have differed in their proposed policies, especially the ideas stemming from the far left; and there are many interesting aims and goals inside the party manifestos that government and civil society might want to consider. By and large, however, there are not large differences in the platforms of the main parties: the Congress of Democrats (CoD), the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), the SWAPO Party (South West African People's Organisation Party) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). Instead it seems that, in Namibia, policy proposals and political positions continue to be subsumed by the legacy of the liberation struggle and politics of the personal.

## 1. Introduction

The parties' policy positions on many issues can be found in their party manifestos. Most of these were published ahead of the 1999 Presidential election, but some have since been updated in anticipation of the 2004 Presidential election. This study is written in the present tense because these manifestos are the most up-to-date positions of the parties, all of which are registered for the upcoming elections. Although the breadth and depth of the manifestos range considerably, and not one party addresses every issue chosen for this study, it is possible to make comparisons across the parties in a qualitative way. This study will make clear that every party contributes its own distinct priorities, solutions to national problems, and ideas as to how the country can best move forward. However, the political party programmes are more alike than they are different, and the parties are shaped by the country's modern history, which has mainly been determined by the liberation struggle.

This study's purpose is to compare the different political parties' platforms across a number of issues to examine whether there are substantial differences in priorities and proposed policies. The conclusions are part of a larger study that compares the different parties in Namibia, and their ideas and positions, ahead of the 2004 Presidential election. The aim of the overall study

is to determine the ideological differences between the political parties, as far as such differences exist, and to use this insight to improve voter education and election campaigns.

## 2. The evolution of Namibian political party platforms

### Swanu of Namibia (SWANU), 1959

Chief Hosea Kutako and other members of the Herero Chief's Council founded the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) on 27 September 1959 as the country's first national liberation party. SWANU (1999b:1) states that it then "became the political home for all the oppressed people of Namibia". Unlike the Ovamboland People's Congress, a precursor to the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and limited mainly to Ovambo members at that point, SWANU was founded as a national political movement. In reality, however, it was also dominated by one ethnic group: the Herero.

SWANU sought to forge unity among various ethnic groups, "to shift the locus of politics from the ethnic to the national level" (Ngavirue 1997:214). In 1960, SWANU declared itself non-aligned in the cold war between East and West, but said it was "violently ... against Western imperialism" (Ngavirue 1997:241). The party opposed apartheid and published five basic aims in SWANU policy aspects (SWANU 1966): to unite the people of SWA as a nation; to fight for the self-determination of the people; to promote the advancement of the people; to work with allied movements to promote pan-Africanism and unity in Africa; and to work with allied movements all over the world to abolish imperialism, tribalism, racialism and all forms of oppression and economic exploitation (Ngavirue 1997:296). These aims were very similar to SWAPO's. One of the major differences between the two was SWANU's emphasis on self-reliance, compared with SWAPO's reliance on the United Nations (UN) to help bring about independence (Dobell 1998:32). The party also advocated a socialist ideology because it said that striving for political freedom on its own, without adding ideology, often led to corruption (Ngavirue 1997:296).

Over the next 40 years, SWANU remained loyal to its socialist beginnings. In August 1999, it formed a socialist alliance with the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP). SWANU's name was to be used for the new alliance, while the WRP would nominate the first parliamentary candidate. It is interesting to note that Namibia's first national movement is almost totally insignificant today, having not once won a seat in Parliament since independence and its current leaders – once personalities like Hosea Kutako – are not well known.



## South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), 1960

The ruling SWAPO Party of Namibia traces its roots back to 2 August 1957 when a group of contract labourers and students formed the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC), a party focused on the plight of Ovambo contract labourers. The OPC began as a party struggling for majority rule in South Africa but quickly focused itself on the liberation of SWA from South Africa. On 19 April 1959 the party was renamed Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO) to form branches in SWA. The OPO cooperated closely with SWANU in 1959, but relations soured due to tension amongst various leaders. The OPO reconstituted and renamed itself SWAPO on 19 April 1960, to give itself a more national face. President Sam Nujoma (2001:101) says this decision was made by the leadership in exile lobbying the UN in New York: "OPO gave the impression that we were only a regional organization and not, as we really were, a national one". Despite shifts in its position over the years, SWAPO has essentially been Afro-nationalist in its ideology.

In 1961, SWAPO (1961, reprinted in Ngavirue 1997:298) issued their "Political Programme". In it they outlined the party's three basic aims: "[to] establish a free, democratic government in SWA founded upon the will and participation of all the people of our country[;] ... to unify all the people of SWA into a cohesive, representative, national political organisation, irrespective of their race, ethnic origin, religion or creed[; and to] ... reconstruct the economic, educational and social foundations which will support and maintain the real African independence which our people desire for themselves". Furthermore, the party's first programme listed a number of political, economic and social aims. On the political side, SWAPO said parliamentarians should be elected by universal adult suffrage, irrespective of sex, property, religion, colour, nationality, place of residence or education. Discrimination or prejudice based upon tribe, nationality or colour was to be made a criminal offence. There was to be freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. SWAPO (1961; cited in *ibid.*) said it also believed in one common nationality for all Africans. SWAPO differed from SWANU in two fundamental ways: it called on the UN to help liberate the country from South Africa, and it was more willing to launch an armed struggle.

On the economic front, SWAPO stressed in 1961 that there would be publicly- as well as privately-owned industry in SWA. Beyond liberating Namibia, the second component of their ideology was to foster a mixed-economy. All basic industries would be publicly owned, including the railway, mining, electrical and fishing industries. Where private industry would be permitted, SWAPO (1961; cited

in *ibid.*:299) said that priority would be given to African-owned industries: "Foreign capital may be allowed in SWA if it will be invested in such industries as are controlled by South West Africans". On the land ownership issue, SWAPO was even stricter, saying that "all existing lands with foreign title deed and ownership shall be placed under the government". Furthermore, the party was to assist and develop multi-tribal cooperatives, especially in agriculture. Turning to social policies, SWAPO pledged to give every South West African suitable employment, to introduce a 40-hour working week, and to abolish forced and contract labour. The party stated that all schools would be publicly funded, and that they were to be free of discrimination with respect to race, sex, religion or colour. SWAPO also stated its intention to increase the number of hospitals and health centres across the country, and offer free health services to all (Ngavirue 1997:299-300).

During the 1960s this platform remained virtually unchanged throughout numerous revised drafts. In the 1970s, SWAPO transformed itself from a liberation movement into a Marxist revolutionary party, courted Cuba and the Soviet Union, and moved its headquarters from Zambia to Angola. In 1975, preparations were being made for the controversial Turnhalle Conference, whereby South Africa sought to negotiate a new constitution with parties operating inside Namibia. SWAPO then drafted its 1975 Discussion paper on the constitution (SWAPO 1975) in the hope of positioning itself as moderate and pro-Western. A year later, however, in its constitution, SWAPO (1976; reprinted in SWAPO 1981:257-58) went back to stressing socialist values. SWAPO (*ibid.*) said it aimed to "unite all Namibian people, particularly the working class, the peasantry and progressive intellectuals into a vanguard party capable of safeguarding national independence and of building a classless, non-exploitative society based on the ideals and principles of scientific socialism". The economic side of the programme stressed the establishment of a classless society by abolishing all forms of exploitation and ensuring that the major means of production and exchange of the country were owned by the people (Dobell 1998:58).

Although SWAPO preached socialism, it has been argued that their stance was more a pragmatic posture influenced by global trends. Hidipo Hamutenya, one of the Programme's main architects, explains in a 1991 interview that the document was partly intended to awaken Western members of the UN Security Council. The latter UN body were reluctant to support SWAPO, fearing the party was going in a Marxist direction. "It didn't take long between [the release of SWAPO's Political Programme] and the resuscitation of the negotiations" (Dobell 1998:58). The document was not widely distributed and left intentionally vague to leave maximum room for negotiations (Dobell 1998:59). Hamutenya, who was instrumental in



attracting foreign investment during 1993 and 2002 while he served as Namibia's Minister of Trade and Industry in an independent Namibia, is a prime example of someone whose ideological beliefs – at least publicly – have changed over time.

When SWAPO (1989) published its Election manifesto in July 1989, it called for a just and equitable society. However, it failed to suggest how it would accomplish this with the limited resources and significant constraints it would inherit (Dobell 1998:93). SWAPO (1989:8) said its economic goal was to “bring change in ownership relations, bring about equitable distribution of national income, create rational linkages of sectors and diversify the economy”. The socialist rhetoric had all but been removed, with SWAPO (ibid.:9) stressing that “[n]o wholesale nationalization of the mines, land and other productive sectors is, however, envisaged in the foreseeable future”, and that “[t]he independent state of Namibia will stand ready to negotiate new and appropriate agreements with both the existing foreign companies and new investors interested in participating in the development of Namibia's resources for mutual benefit”.

During the liberation struggle SWAPO identified itself as a socialist party. Since then, however, according to Canadian political scientist Lauren Dobell (1998:15) in its role as the ruling party it has shown virtually no traces of the “scientific socialist” philosophy. Dobell (ibid.), who has studied SWAPO's development from 1960 to the present day, holds that the party changed almost overnight into a moderate, social-democratic pro-capitalist party. Furthermore, she (ibid.:17) found that over time there was “an absence of any consistent beliefs other than the fundamental desire for independence from colonial rule”. Indeed, in the transition to independence, SWAPO stressed the need for economic growth and the importance of an “enabling environment” for foreign investment. In short, Dobell (ibid.:59) argues, “SWAPO's real political thinking during this period, despite its own public claims and those of both allies and enemies, never moved beyond its nationalist programme of the 1960s”.

It is important to note the context of history, i.e. that SWAPO's thinking was affected by the collapse of the Soviet bloc countries and the demands of international development aid agencies; and that other liberation parties, like the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, went through similar programme shifts. That said, there are elements within the SWAPO Party, especially unionists, who believe SWAPO “sold itself out” at independence. The ANC has faced similar criticism.

In 1997, SWAPO changed its name to SWAPO Party of Namibia. SWAPO or SWAPO Party will be used, depending on the historical context. The

SWAPO Party's positions on social, economic and political issues will be discussed in more detail later herein, but at this point it is fair to say that their policy proposals do not differ dramatically from the party's 1961 vision of a free, unified Namibia with a combination of publicly- and privately-owned industries, and that their ideology remains one of Afro-nationalism.

### **National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO), 1964**

The Herero Chief's Council founded NUDO on 25 September 1964. The party aimed to unite the different black communities into one organisation. Like SWAPO and SWANU, NUDO had representatives abroad, lobbying the international community for an independent South West Africa.

In its constitution NUDO (1964) aims at “[awakening] the political consciousness of the people as a unified nation with one aim and one destiny”. The group pledged to fight for independence, to remove all forms of oppression and exploitation, to establish a non-racial government, and to work for the social, economic and political reconstruction of the country. Its economic policy advocated a mixture of traditional and free-market systems, with a strong emphasis on land redistribution and the restoration of traditional land (Pütz, Von Egidy & Caplan 1990:200).

In 1977, NUDO became one of the main members of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) until it broke away in late 2003 to resume its independent status. Chief Kuiama Riruako said he did this because the DTA had died a long time ago (Amupadhi 2004:1). NUDO's pre-independence constitution remained as it was after independence. Its policy positions and ideologies prior to 2003 are analysed in the DTA section. As an independent party in 2003, NUDO once again focused on unity and on land redistribution. In 2004, the party released a policy paper entitled “Federalism or unitarism”, in which it came out in favour of national unity and federalism (NUDO 2004:1).

### **Republican Party (RP), 1977**

The RP was formed in October 1977 when Dirk Mudge, Deputy Chairman of the National Party (NP), led a walkout with 80 others from the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference when the NP insisted certain racist apartheid laws should be maintained in Namibia. The RP (2003:2) says it sought to “bring an end to the policy of racial discrimination and to improve racial relations amongst all the peoples of Namibia”. The party joined the DTA when the alliance was formed a month later. Its political programme and economic policies were the same as the DTA's.



The RP dissolved in 1991 when the DTA became a single party. Up until 2003, RP members were encouraged to join the DTA. In April that year, former RP members decided to reactivate the party, largely because they said the DTA had failed to promote reconciliation and lacked credibility as an opposition party: "Not only did the DTA fail to promote racial harmony and national reconciliation, but it has also lost credibility as the official opposition by neglecting to make a meaningful contribution both country wide [sic] and in Parliament" (RP 2003:2). So far, the RP's platform differs little from the DTA's.

#### **Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), 1977**

The DTA became a unified political party on 2 December 1991. However, its roots can be traced back to 5 November 1977 when the DTA was formed as an alliance (rather than a party) between like-minded political parties with the hope of establishing an internal government. The 11 founding parties, including NUDO and the RP, had walked out of the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference together when the NP insisted that certain racist apartheid legislation should be maintained in a proposed new constitution. The Conference had been organised by South Africa in an attempt to sideline SWAPO, which was highly popular. Those that participated in the Conference were so-called "internal parties" backed by South Africa. Although the DTA left the Conference, it has never quite managed to shake off the impression that it collaborated with the apartheid administration in its attempt to root out SWAPO at all costs.

In 1989, the DTA's (1989:4) manifesto proposed an independent, free and sovereign Namibia. The DTA opposed violence, advocated equality for all, and rejected apartheid in all its forms. They also emphasised a policy of national reconciliation and harmony. The party's political programme also favoured a mixed economy, with the maximum participation of free enterprise as well as the right to own private property and communal land. The DTA also advocated socio-economic policies "aimed at correcting fundamental inequalities and defects" (Pütz, Von Egidy & Caplan 1990:68) in the socio-economic structure through development programmes.

In 2000, after the establishment and success of the CoD in the 1999 parliamentary election where it penetrated the DTA's support base, the DTA formed a coalition with the United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF) to retain its status as the official opposition. Although the DTA became a single party in 1991, it continued to share its umbrella with members of NUDO and the RP until they both broke away in 2003. The DTA has been the official opposition since independence, but it has constantly and dramatically lost voter support during the years.

#### **United Democratic Front (UDF), 1989**

The UDF was formed as an alliance between eight parties on 25 February 1989 as a centrist, liberation movement whose aim was to challenge SWAPO after the international community declared it the sole and authentic liberation movement in 1976. The UDF's leading party was the Damara Council. The latter body was created in 1971 by South Africa as an administrative council of chiefs and public figures that would prepare Damaraland to assume the status of an "independent homeland". Justus Garoëb, Chief of the Damara since 1982, was the UDF's founding President and continues to head the party today. The UDF sees itself as offering an alternative through "advocating a mixed economy, a guaranteed right to own private property, and the representation of traditional chiefs in a council of chiefs, with the protection of cultural and language rights" (Cliffe 1994:152).

The UDF (2000:1) claims that SWAPO had grown arrogant over time, and that it wanted "all power and credit for itself". This disillusionment with SWAPO had motivated the UDF's formation (ibid.). In 1989, the UDF said that it believed local authorities should have as much autonomy as possible. It sought a national, free and compulsory educational system, but made allowances for private schools. The UDF proposed a mixed economy with the guaranteed right to own private property, but advocated the state having "a regulatory role regarding ownership to prevent monopolies and economic sabotage" (Pütz, Von Egidy & Caplan 1990:80). The WRP, which had helped form part of the alliance, left in 1990. It later joined SWANU. By 1999, the UDF had become a unified party rather than an alliance. The following year it formed a coalition with the DTA to consolidate the official opposition. One area in which the UDF has tried to make a difference, especially through former parliamentarian Eric Biwa, is by raising the SWAPO detainee issue in Parliament on a number of occasions.

#### **Worker's Revolutionary Party (WRP), 1989**

This Trotskyist party was founded in May 1989 to mobilise the working classes and the dispossessed peasantry. Like many other parties, the WRP was formed as a counterbalance to SWAPO, which they claimed was unable to fight against colonial imperialism (Pütz, Von Egidy & Caplan 1990:307). The WRP aligned itself with the UDF alliance in 1989-1990 during the time of the first national election, and formed a socialist alliance with SWANU in the 1999 parliamentary election. In 2004 the party reported that it was not currently allied with any other group or party.

The WRP's 1994 manifesto was prepared by fellow Trotskyists in South Africa and contains no references to Namibia. Instead, the manifesto rails



against apologists such as the ANC for their imperialism and capitalism: for having “sold out on all the main demands of the oppressed and exploited in favour of unity with the capitalists and reactionaries”. That said, the party does take many positions similar to those of more mainstream Namibian political parties, like calling for a guaranteed living wage, decent housing for all, and free universal health care (WRP 1994:4). Like NUDO, the WRP has been very consistent in its ideology since its inception.

#### **Monitor Action Group (MAG), 1991**

MAG was formed in 1991 by members of the Aksie Christelik Nasionaal (literally, “Action Christian National”) alliance, who wanted to concentrate on shaping opinions rather than on conflict politics. MAG, which is historically linked to the Namibian counterpart of South Africa’s National Party (NP), has given up on trying to regain its role as the ruling party. It now focuses on highlighting issues it deems important via its National Assembly seat, a newsletter, and a column by MAG Chairman Kosie Pretorius in the Windhoek Observer. Issues of interest to MAG are religion, group rights, land reform and private land ownership. “We actually want people to support our ideas rather than our party” (MAG 2003a:2).

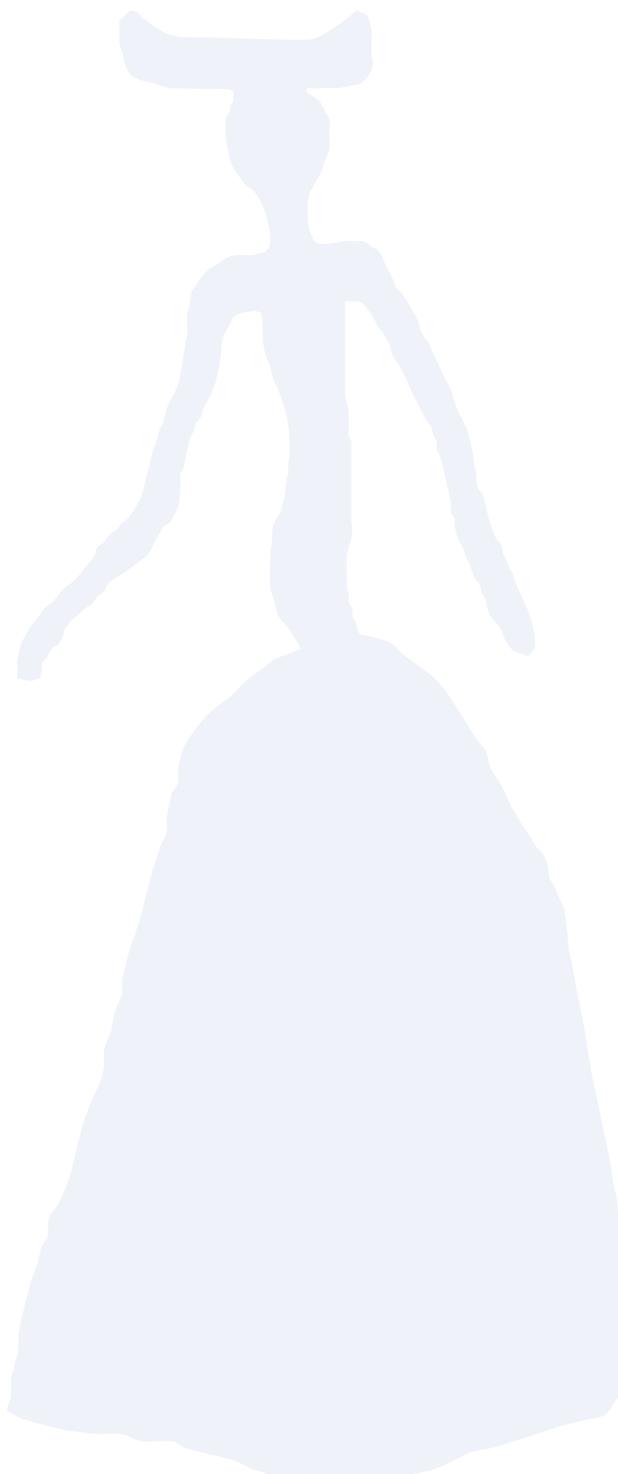
With the exception of SWANU and the WRP, MAG’s (2004:3) beliefs are the most fundamentally different from all others, starting with the fact that it does not recognise the (secular) Constitution of the Republic of Namibia. The group also seeks a Namibia that is made up of interdependent multicultural and self-ruling communities (Chirawu 2003:154), thereby contradicting every other party’s vision of a unified Namibia.

#### **Congress of Democrats (CoD), 1999**

The youngest party is the CoD. It was created on 23 March 1999, when Ben Ulenga and other founding members became disillusioned with the government, “which benefits only an elite, and is out of touch with the rest of the nation” (CoD 1999c:1). Ulenga is a former SWAPO member and Robben Island political prisoner who rose from the unions to become a diplomat. Ulenga resigned as Namibia’s High Commissioner to the United Kingdom in 1998 after two years of service because he was “deeply disillusioned” with the ruling party (Hopwood 1998:1). Ulenga criticised the SWAPO Party for the way in which members of the senior leadership were lining their pockets; their tribalistic attitudes; their silence over the issue of Lubango detainees; the handling of complaints by unemployed former SWAPO fighters; Nujoma’s decision to run as President for a third term – causing the Namibian Constitution to be amended; and, ultimately, Namibia’s involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The CoD states its aim as being to become

“Namibia’s bridge to a 21st century of progress and development in all areas of human endeavour, justice and equity” (CoD 1999a:3).

The CoD differs from the SWAPO Party, the party it broke away from, in that it desires to have a smaller government, fewer parastatals, more power for the Regions, and a greater role for traditional and religious leaders. Although it was the CoD’s aim to create an alternative movement to the ruling party, the election results suggest that the DTA – rather than the SWAPO Party – suffered most from the CoD’s arrival at the polling stations.



**3. Election results, 1989-1999****Table 1: Votes received by parties in elections from 1989-1999 (%)**

	1989 CA	1992 RC	1992 LA	1994 PE	1994 NA	1998 LA	1998 RC	1999 PE	1999 NA
ACN	3.53	n/a							
CoD	n/a	10.49	9.94						
DTA	28.55	22.11	33.27	23.08	20.45	23.91	15.69	9.64	9.48
MAG	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.81	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.67
NUDO	n/a								
RP	n/a								
SWANU	n/a	n/a	1.49	n/a	0.52	0.23	n/a	n/a	n/a
SWANU/WRP	n/a	0.35							
SWAPO	57.33	74.74	58.00	74.46	72.72	60.35	80.39	76.85	76.15
UDF	5.65	3.16	5.88	n/a	2.68	6.66	3.92	3.02	2.93
WRP	n/a	n/a	0.09	n/a	0.19	0.10	n/a	n/a	n/a

CA = Constituent Assembly

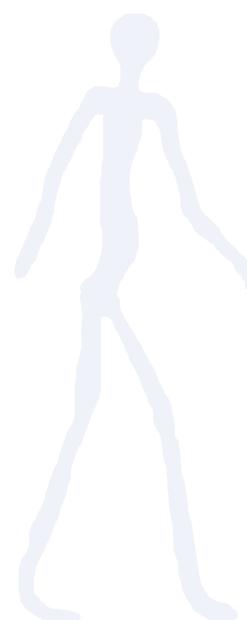
LA = Local Authority

NA = National Assembly

PE = Presidential elections

RC = Regional Council

n/a = not applicable because did not participate

**Table 2: Seats in the National Assembly, 1990 - 2004.**

	1990 - 1994	1995 - 1999	2000 - 2004
SWAPO	41	53	55
DTA	21	15	7
CoD	n/a	n/a	7
UDF	4	2	2
MAG	n/a	1	1
NPF	1	1	n/a
ACN	3	n/a	n/a
NNF	1	n/a	n/a
FCN	1	n/a	n/a

FCN = Federal Convention of Namibia

NNF = Namibia National Front

NPF = National Patriotic Front of Namibia

Source: RoN (2003)



## 4. Party platforms compared

This section compares the various parties' platforms across the following seven political, economic and social issues:

- external relations
- freedom and democracy
- government
- economy
- welfare and quality of life
- fabric of society, and
- social groups.

Most of the information is culled from party manifestos and constitutions. In some cases, other official party documents were used. Because most parties have not yet produced new manifestos for the 2004 elections, their 1999 manifestos contain their most up-to-date positions.

### A. External relations

#### Foreign affairs

Since independence, Namibia has become an active member of the UN, the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and a number of other international organisations. Government has also sent troops to a number of regional conflicts. However, despite the importance of foreign affairs, only five of the nine parties refer to the topic in their manifestos.

The CoD, DTA, NUDO and the SWAPO Party all mention the importance of cooperating closely with other African states. The DTA and the SWAPO Party say they are committed to bringing peace and stability to the southern African region. The DTA (1999b:13) also promotes a Common Market of Southern African States and is the only party to explicitly mention supporting SADC. The only negative reference to foreign relations comes by way of the UDF (2000:2), which worries that political leadership in Namibia "relates very closely to the Zimbabwean government[,] hence the fear that the Zimbabwean history may repeat itself in Namibia".

#### Decolonisation

Many of today's political parties were founded when Namibia was still colonised by South Africa. Thus, their aims, ideologies and identities are often related to the struggle for independence. The SWAPO Party and SWANU were liberation movements that operated in exile, lobbied the world community, and tried to bring independence to the people of Namibia. The DTA, which then included the now independent DTA, NUDO and RP, sought an independent Namibia through negotiating directly with South Africa from inside SWA.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:5) continues to portray itself as a liberation party "fighting for the freedom of all Namibians from social, cultural, political and

economic oppression". The UDF (1999a:1-2) also still refers to itself as a "liberation movement", and commits itself to eliminating colonialism and imperialism and freedom from "foreign domination". The CoD, DTA, NUDO, SWANU and the SWAPO Party all stress national unity and nation-building.

#### Peace

The DTA, the SWAPO Party and the UDF all highlight the importance of peace and reconciliation. The DTA (1999b:7) hopes to promote understanding, goodwill and cooperation among everyone in the pursuit of national unity and peace. The SWAPO Party (1999a:5) titled its 1999 election manifesto "Peace, progress and prosperity", and claims it has, as the ruling party, worked relentlessly for peace in the country and in the southern African region. The SWAPO Party admits that peace suffered during the ethnic conflict in the Caprivi, but maintains it now aims to "build unity without sacrificing diversity". The UDF (2000:1) describes itself as the guardian of democracy, peace and reconciliation.

### B. Freedom and democracy

#### Freedom and domestic human rights

The SWAPO Party (1999a:5) emphasises the importance of freedom, saying it is working towards freedom from discrimination on the basis of religion, sex or ethnicity. The DTA and NUDO are the only parties to explicitly mention human rights. NUDO (2004a:1) states in its constitution that it seeks to defend and protect human rights and all traditional cultures and customs. In its constitution, the DTA (1999c:9) stresses the importance of human rights: "Everyone shall have the right to life, and no person shall be deprived of his life by anyone". The party contends everyone should have the right to work and to express their opinions freely, but that such rights are closely related to corresponding responsibilities.

#### Democracy

Almost all of the parties mention the importance of democracy in their manifestos and other campaign literature. The only exceptions are the DTA (despite the fact that it has the term democratic in its name), SWANU and the WRP, the latter two being Marxist-Leninist and Trotskyist in ideology, respectively.

#### Constitutionalism

With two exceptions, all of the political parties mention the importance of respecting the Namibian Constitution. MAG (2004:3) believes the word secular should be removed from the Constitution, while the WRP's manifesto does not mention the Constitution at all.



## C. Government

### Decentralisation

There has been a growing debate about how more power can be devolved to authorities in Namibia's 13 Regions. The SWAPO Party (1999a:6) maintains it is fully committed to devolving a number of functions and services from central government to lower levels of state authority, i.e. to regional and local authorities. However, some of the SWAPO Party's opponents criticise its track record as the ruling party – as will be outlined below.

The CoD (2001:5) aims to grant "real political and economic power" to the Regions, making sure each Region gets equal powers, and thus facilitate genuine social and economic development. Furthermore, the party states it "rejects government's attempts to emasculate ... regional government and vest [its power] in the hands of a President in Windhoek" (CoD 1999c:2). The DTA (1999b:8) supports a decentralised unitary state with the accompanying devolution of power. It argues that Regional Councils should be equipped with the power to control regional government. NUDO (n.d.:1) also believes the Regions should receive additional governing powers and the potential to earn more revenue. The party claims these powers are too limited at present. It also stresses all 13 Regions need to be developed equally.

There are also moves under way to give local government more political power over their communities. The CoD believes representative local government should be strengthened, i.e. for the national government to share political power and responsibility amongst central and local government. The CoD (1999c:2) would provide elected local officials with resources, training and systematic capacity-building programmes. The DTA (1999c:10) believes local communities should be directly responsible for the management of their local schools, clinics, primary roads, water affairs and many other local affairs issues. The SWAPO Party (1999a:6) maintains it is committed to devolving a number of functions and services from central government to the lower levels of state authority in order to maximise community participation. Both the RP and the UDF propose local government should be apolitical. The RP (2003:3) would like the ward system of voter representation to be reintroduced in local government.

There are a number of religious and traditional leaders in Namibia who have ruled over their tribes and communities for long periods. Although Namibia is now a democratic state, many of these traditional authorities still play significant roles. This can be a very sensitive issue because, as Keulder (2000:150) and others have pointed out, some traditional leaders were "created" during the

colonial period, so their relevance (and legitimacy) in a postcolonial era are sometimes challenged.

The government recognises traditional leaders and a council of these authorities advises the President. However, some of the parties promote a greater decision-making role for these leaders. The DTA (1999b:8) states it supports an active contribution by, and the stabilising role of, traditional leaders and authorities. The CoD (2001:6) aims to promote participatory democracy and consultation amongst all society's stakeholders, including religious and traditional leaders. The DTA (1999c:4) suggests government should take into account the roles of traditional leaders, include elements of traditional law in the judicial system, and bring practitioners of African traditional medicine into mainstream health services. Most surprisingly, the UDF (1999b:2) which is headed by a Damara Chief, in turn, desires traditional leaders to be apolitical.

### Efficiency

Two of the political parties touch on the issue of how large the national government should be. The CoD (1999c:2) believes the Namibian government should be reduced from the current Cabinet of 26 Ministers to one of only 15, because it is one of the largest in Africa. The CoD would also cut down on salaries, car allowances and other perks. The UDF (1999b:2) favours a small, effective and productive government. It claims that the civil service is currently too big, and that appointments are meaningless because they are doled out for political reasons.

### Government corruption

Many political parties refer to the problem of corruption. The SWAPO Party (1999a:23) pledges to create anti-corruption initiatives to "root out this scourge from our society". The UDF (2000:2) contends that poorly paid police officers are particularly susceptible to corruption. The party believes corruption can best be addressed at regional government level.

Of all the parties, the CoD (2001:6) has the most recommendations on how to curb corruption. The party already has a code of conduct for its own leaders and vows to "fight corruption and nepotism in all its forms" (ibid.). The CoD believes in holding leaders accountable and removing them if they are unable to meet the expectations of their constituencies. In a CoD-led government, political leaders would be forced to declare their private interests publicly in order to counter corruption and self-enrichment, "which is so prevalent amongst the present political elite".

The DTA (1999b: 5) commits itself to "the prevention and ultimate total elimination of all forms of corruption and nepotism in politics, public administration and private enterprise". The DTA proposed working with the Auditor General, who



is co-responsible for the identification, prevention and elimination of all forms of corruption. NUDO (n.d.:1) would prohibit Permanent Secretaries and members of the public service from sitting on boards of private companies “so they can perform their duties and be free of temptations of corrupt practice”.

#### **Government effectiveness and authority**

Many parties cite the use of parastatals as a particularly ineffective way of managing the economy. Parastatals are companies or institutions in which the state has a complete or controlling shareholding. Often, these organisations have to be created because they supply key goods and services to the economy that would not otherwise be supplied by the private sector. As of 2003, there were more than 45 parastatals in Namibia. Because many of them operate at a loss, with some having suffered due to mismanagement and corruption, there has been a growing debate about their role in the country.

The CoD (1999c:2) aims to “put an end to the waste and self-enrichment schemes in the parastatal sector” by setting performance and delivery standards to serve the taxpayer. The DTA (1999b:10) suggests parastatals prove they can be economically viable. When warranted, the DTA would then create, empower and support the requisite independent parastatal organisations. The UDF (2000:3) states government involvement in parastatals should be minimised.

### **D. Economy**

#### **Economic policy**

One of the most important issues across Namibia is managing the economy. More specifically, it is the challenge of creating more employment, especially jobs that provide decent wages. Most of the parties believe in a market-based approach to the economy, with limited state intervention. When it comes to details about their economic policies, the various parties differ on the role of the private sector, the degree and nature of state responsibility, and the role of parastatals in the economy.

The CoD (1999c:5) pledges to build and sustain an economy that is attractive to its citizens in terms of applying their expertise and skills, and is able to retain such expertise and skills. The party would do so through attracting foreign direct investment, assisting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and promoting further investment in infrastructure. Similarly, the DTA believes in the virtues of a mixed economy and strives for a sound macroeconomic environment “conducive to the stability of the balance of payments and prices” to sustain economic growth and to achieve the highest possible rate of employment. The party proposes that natural resources, such as fish, minerals and agriculture,

be utilised for the direct benefit of the country’s inhabitants (DTA 1999b:9-10).

The SWAPO Party (1999a) states its top priorities are economic growth and job creation. It aims to achieve this through prudent management, the creation of favourable conditions for investment, assisting SMEs, and encouraging entrepreneurs. The party also states its intent to use the country’s “sovereign power” to “mobilise resources required to put productive plans in action”. The UDF (2000:2) believes in market principles and prefers the country to have a free economy. It goes beyond the other parties by stating it would “facilitate rather than interfere with market forces”.

MAG (2004:1) pronounces it supports a “free market system”, but supplies no further details of its economic programme. Similarly, the RP (2003:4) does not outline a full economic policy. Instead, the party criticises the way the economy is currently being managed: “Natural resources wealth is not being redistributed because of poor management and corruption” (ibid.).

The only parties to waver dramatically from the free market approach are SWANU and the WRP. SWANU prefers a centrally planned economy. The party would nationalise the fishing industry and build public work schemes. In an announcement in 1999 regarding its alliance with the WRP, SWANU stated that “capitalism has taken humanity to the precipice” and left the world with one option – socialism or barbarism (Amupadhi 1999:1). SWANU has stood by its socialist approach since independence.

#### **Growth is key**

Almost all the political parties view the private sector as the main driver of economic growth. The DTA (1999b:10), for example, deems the private sector “the most important vehicle for development” and pledges to promote and support all sensible private enterprise initiatives. The CoD (1999c:5-6) highlights the importance of the tourism, manufacturing and agriculture sectors, and pledges to promote SMEs, export growth and further agricultural development. The one exception is SWANU (1999a:2), which once again favours a planned economy approach, with “large public work schemes” to be created to boost employment and the economy.

#### **Tax policies**

Although tax is an important issue that affects many voters, it does not receive much attention in party manifestos. Only the CoD, DTA and WRP include references to tax in their programmes. The CoD (1999c:6) proposes reforming the tax system by improving and broadening the tax base. It also aims to stem tax evasion. The CoD advocates progressive taxation because it “relieves the poor from the heavy tax burden” (ibid.). However, the party does not address how it will both broaden



the tax base and relieve the poor. The DTA, on the other hand, focuses on the private sector. The party (1999b:6) aims to offer additional financial incentives, such as tax relief, to attract foreign investment and promote private-sector initiatives. The WRP (1994:4), without elaborating, declares that the value-added tax (VAT) should be scrapped.

#### **Where to focus public spending**

When it comes to government spending, several parties mention the improvement of infrastructure as the most important priority. The SWAPO Party (1999a:20) promises it will invest in infrastructure, promote investment in productive sectors, and seek to maintain a very low external debt. The party also pledges to “not subject” the country to International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank loans. The UDF (2000:3) proposes using tax revenues towards “the needs of the people” – without specifying what those needs may be – and to the further development of infrastructure.

The CoD (1999a:4) advocates an “equitable allocation of resources to the [R]egions” to achieve development across the whole country, while the DTA (1999b:10) states it intends to focus on the private sector by encouraging small industries and business ventures through facilitating training and financing. It also seeks to promote a more diverse shareholding in larger industries and to introduce programmes where workers can hold shares in the companies that they work for.

#### **Attracting more investment**

Most of the parties aim to attract more foreign investment as well as make it easier for the domestic private sector to access capital. The CoD (1999c:5) proposes promoting the availability of domestic credit, raising public sector investment, and reducing red tape. The UDF (2000:2) states it would guarantee that local and foreign investments are safe in Namibia, and would use liberal legislation and broad incentive schemes to attract investors. The party also proposes that foreign investors would be required to transfer technology and know-how to Namibians (ibid.).

The DTA (1999b:6) pledges an aggressive investment policy to procure foreign investment in support of the promotion, growth, support and development of the economy. The SWAPO Party (1999a:22) declares it seeks to create a “favourable investment climate” for the mining sector and seeks to provide Export Processing Zone (EPZ) status opportunities for the manufacturing industry. SWANU (1999a:4) states it would only permit mining companies to invest in factories that are at least 51% Namibian-owned because this would be “the only means of permanent development”.

#### **Reducing unemployment**

Parties that highlight the importance of reducing unemployment stress the need for government

and the private sector to work together to create more jobs. The UDF (2000:3) states the present rate of unemployment is “unacceptable and a disgrace”. It believes more investments, special provisions and education are needed to alleviate the situation, and that the “private and public sectors should work hand in hand”. According to the CoD (1999c:5-6), investment, SMEs, exports and agricultural development have to be boosted to create more employment. Committed to the plight of workers, the WRP (1994:4) propounds work for all, unemployment benefits, and full job security.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:17) pledges to accelerate job creation through increased support for SMEs, investment and entrepreneurial skills, and by widening access to training, capital and marketing support. The DTA (1999b:10) contends private enterprise is the primary instrument for the creation of employment opportunities. The party also believes everyone has the right to work and, therefore, to alleviate the problem of unemployment, a DTA-led government would set up a special Unemployment Compensation Fund to help the unemployed (DTA 1999c:9). The party does not explain where the funds would come from, however.

#### **Poverty reduction efforts**

Most parties state their commitment to reducing poverty levels. Most maintain that this can best be achieved by government, the private sector, or by the two combining efforts in some way. The DTA (1999b:10) proposes concentrating on the general upliftment of the rural areas and local authorities, and stimulating economic growth in areas that have previously been neglected. It deems private enterprise to be the primary agent in relieving poverty. The UDF (1999b:4), on the other hand, proposes increasing the necessary investments and skills development, but believes the best means of addressing these issues is through regional government.

NUDO (2004a:1) only states it aims to “promote the creation of wealth” to upgrade the underprivileged, without explaining how it would go about doing this. The RP (2003:4) complains too little has been done to alleviate poverty at grass-roots level, claiming that “the (newly) rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer”, but the party offers little by way of solutions. The SWAPO Party (1999a:20) proposed alleviating poverty through “Namibianisation”, i.e. encouraging employers in the fishing and other key sectors to increase the number of jobs and incomes for Namibians.

#### **The privatisation question**

The various parties’ differ in their response to the issue of whether companies should be privatised or whether they should be controlled by the state. The DTA (1999b:10) declares that the state’s interference in the country’s economy



should be kept to a minimum. The UDF (2000:3) believes privatisation should be encouraged.

The only other comments made by parties about privatisation revolve around parastatals, as already discussed in section C. above, under "Government effectiveness and authority".

#### Setting a minimum wage

Only three political parties – NUDO, SWANU and the WRP – address the issue of a minimum wage in their manifestos: all of them state that wages should be linked to a quality standard of living. NUDO (n.d.:1) believes there should be a "wage structure" that allows all Namibian workers to live above the minimum subsistence level and the poverty line. SWANU (1999a:2) and the WRP (1999:4) want a national living wage tied to the rate of inflation, which would help workers adapt to the rising cost of living.

### E. Welfare and quality of life

#### Environmental protection

Many of the political parties highlight the importance of safeguarding the environment. The CoD (2001:5) declares it stands for "the protection of our environment and the sustainable utilization of Namibia's natural and other resources". The party proposes creating incentives and conditions for individuals and communities to care for the environment so that the rights of all Namibians to clean air, clean water and clean and productive soils can be safeguarded (CoD 1999c:7). Furthermore, they (ibid.) would require all developments that have a potentially significant impact on the environment to be subjected to appropriate environmental impact assessments.

The DTA (1999b:7) states it is "alarmed about the progressive deterioration of the environment", and notes with concern that there are problems relating to nation-wide environmental degradation. It declares it is committed to "a holistic, long-term approach" to the conservation of nature and the renewal of all natural resources. Therefore, it seeks to establish and maintain environmental education centres and research institutions. It also pledges that any further development of tourism will be subject to rigorous control in respect of maintaining wildlife populations, a balanced ecology and a clean environment.

The UDF (1999b:6) states that the sustainable exploration of all natural resources should be allowed, and that special care should be taken to preserve and protect the environment. They (ibid.) also believe regional government to be the best medium for addressing environmental questions. SWANU (1999a:2) limits its environmental intervention to declaring that the dumping of toxic waste would be prohibited in order to prevent pollution and the poisoning of underground water.

#### Providing housing

Almost all of the parties address the problem of insufficient adequate housing in Namibia. The most common solution proposed by the various parties is that government should provide housing directly to its citizens. One party, the CoD (1999c:5), maintains companies should also be encouraged to build houses for their employees.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:23) states it intent to accelerate the provision of low-cost housing. The UDF (1999b:5) aims to provide every citizen with decent, affordable housing, and pledges to replace all squatter camps with housing. SWANU (1999a:2) proposes public works schemes as a way of solving the housing problem. The CoD (1999c:5) declares it would revamp the government's housing policy to cover all income levels, but with the emphasis on housing for low-income groups and the unemployed, and by setting specific targets related to these groups. The party (ibid.) also proposes restructuring the National Housing Enterprise and the Build-Together Programme, and aims to ensure property prices are affordable: possibly through subsidies to the poor and by encouraging the private sector to provide housing for its employees.

The DTA (1999b:15) espouses a "home ownership for all" policy, but believes regional and local authorities should take the initiative in the provision of housing. The government would support regional and local authorities financially and through assistance with planning.

#### Access to health services

All the political parties stress the need for greater access to health services, especially in rural and urban areas populated by the poor. Most of their suggestions require additional funding, but none of the recommendations include possible sources of such revenue.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:10-11) states it seeks to improve and maintain health services, emphasising preventative care as much as curative care. It aims to focus on women and children, and provide greater access to prenatal and post-natal care. The CoD (1999c:4) plans to retain the Directorate of Primary Health Care in the Ministry of Health and Social Services, but proposes decentralising resources to communities, expanding services to underserved areas, and building new clinics and health centres. It would set up quality control units at all levels; train more doctors, nurses and other health professionals; and explore new technologies. The party also pledges to broaden the sources of health care financing, and explore the possibility of a national/social health insurance scheme. More controversially, it intends to "open the debate" on the right of women to have open reproductive choices (ibid.).



The DTA (1999b:16) favours creating an “extensive health policy, embracing preventative, curative and specialised health care”. It believes (ibid.) policy implementation should be delegated to regional and local authorities, and undertakes not to refuse treatment to anyone simply because they are unable to pay for the service. The DTA (1999c:7-8) also expresses its intent to upgrade existing hospitals and clinics, introduce a nutritious diet for patients, pay for overtime and weekend work, reinstate transport for health workers, and restore effective ambulance and emergency services countrywide.

The UDF and the RP criticise the current state of health services, but offer little by way of solutions. The UDF (2000:5) claims health services “are deteriorating”, and that “[m]ore quality centres need to be established and more proportional distribution of resources are needed, especially in rural areas”. The RP (2003:4) declares “the situation at state hospitals is critical and the morale of doctors and nurses distressingly low”.

#### **Combating HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS is currently the primary cause of death and hospitalisation in Namibia. By the end of 2001, the country was estimated to have an HIV prevalence rate of 22.5%, making it one of the top five affected countries in the world (USAID 2003:1). It is then surprising that only three of the political parties make any mention whatsoever of the deadly impact of HIV/AIDS.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:23) aims to counter HIV/AIDS through social and cultural change. It has, therefore, embarked on a concerted and extensive campaign of prevention and control of all sexually transmitted diseases. The SWAPO Party (ibid.) has also said it wanted to declare HIV infection a notifiable disease, although initial plans to identify publicly people living with HIV have been dropped after consultations with civil society. The CoD (1999c:4) undertakes to declare HIV/AIDS a national emergency, and would coordinate the combating of HIV/AIDS from the Office of the President. It (ibid.) pledges to help those living with HIV/AIDS by reducing their financial burden and strengthening basic support services such as counselling, nutrition and treatment.

The UDF (1999b:7) believes awareness campaigns should be launched to promote morality. It also calls for increased government involvement to help make drugs more accessible, and believes counselling services should be promoted. Furthermore, the party states it would like to “quietly promote condom usage without provoking churches” (ibid.). MAG (2003b:4), on the other hand, has only addressed the issue by stating in one of its newsletters that “the best way to fight AIDS is moral values”.

#### **Educating the masses**

The SWAPO Party and most of the other political parties agree that primary education should continue to be free, but that higher education should be affordable. The CoD (1999c:4) intends to streamline the management of education, youth and sports under a single ministry, thereby creating savings that would be used to provide more bursaries to students in institutions of higher learning. It seeks to realise the goal of a free basic education and to cancel out “hidden costs” at primary and junior secondary school levels (ibid.).

The DTA (1999b:14) declares education should be free and compulsory up to the age of 16 or Grade 6, whichever comes first for the individual child. Secondary and tertiary education would not be free or compulsory, but the DTA would attempt to provide an adequate number of bursaries. The party pledges it would also “upgrade teachers” as a cardinal prerequisite for effective education (ibid.). The WRP (1994:4) proposed that education be mandatory up to matriculation level (Grade 12) or the age of 18, whichever comes first for the individual learner. SWANU (1999a:5) would levy multinational mining and fishing corporations to pay for the building of schools and subsidised (and, thus, free) education for all. The party also proposed creating a representative commission to revise the education system to “suit the needs and aspirations” of the Namibian people (ibid.).

#### **Updating the curriculum**

When addressing school curricula most of the parties believe that schools should teach skills that prepare learners for the working world, and that there should be apprenticeships, vocational training and access to computers.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:12-13) seeks to redress inequities and inefficiencies by restructuring curricula to meet the challenges of the future. It intends increasing emphasis on promoting skills training and managerial competence to “ensure that young people are equipped with marketable skills that will enable them to locate and secure productive employment, or become entrepreneurs”. The party also pledges to promote vocational training, eradicate illiteracy, and make computer science and information technology compulsory school subjects (ibid.)

The UDF (1999b:5-6) stresses the need for more computers, declaring they are not a luxury but an essential educational asset that should be introduced in primary school. The CoD (2001:4) believes in developing Namibians’ full potential, both in terms of skills and critical thinking. It proposes a broad-based education that would “inculcate a sense of tolerance, civil duty and responsible citizenship”.



By means of a strategy focused on education and human development, Namibia's youth would be able to meet the demands of the 21st century. The education system also needs to be tailored to employment needs and the future development of the economy (CoD 1999a:3-4). NUDO (n.d.:1) proposes establishing vocational schools in all 13 Regions, with bursaries available to learners on merit.

The DTA (1999c:5-7) believes educational opportunities should be available to all. It pledges to create apprenticeship training, as well as civic education to strengthen democratic values. Controversially, the party also proposes all Namibian teachers should be retrained, during which time foreign teachers should serve in their places (ibid.). SWANU (1999a:6), on the other hand, demands all foreign experts are immediately removed from educational institutions. It also intends to promote world literature and poetry (ibid.). The RP (2003:4) believes the present education policy "lacks consistency" because teachers do not enjoy job security or appropriate remuneration. The party also argues the government should resume its responsibility for pre-primary education (ibid.).

## F. Fabric of society

### Combating crime

A number of parties cite crime as a serious problem. A popular solution is to provide the Namibian Police with more funding and to give convicted criminals harsher sentences. NUDO (n.d.:1) states it has "zero tolerance" for crime, and proposes it would strive for a fully equipped, effective and efficient police force. The CoD (1999c:3) also claims to have no tolerance for crime, and seeks to address its root causes. The party aims to review gun legislation, elevate the status of police services, recruit and train more police officers, and improve their pay and working conditions (ibid.).

The SWAPO Party (1999a:23) intends to increase its efforts to counter crime against women and children and to strengthen support mechanisms for the victims of crime. The party also proposes to make it more difficult for serious offenders to get bail (ibid.). The UDF (1999b:3) claims the police force has become "incompetent and unprofessional" due to too much political interference. Therefore, it seeks to restore the dignity of the police as well as their professional ethics (UDF 2000:2).

### Rule of law

Several opposition parties mention the need for reforming the rule of law. The DTA (1999b:17) admits it is a challenge to reconcile a variety of cultures in the drive to build a nation. It states cognisance needs to be taken of traditional customs and authority structures, and expresses

its distress at the low standard of justice practised in the lower courts (ibid.). The CoD (2001:6) vows to protect, defend and uphold the Constitution, just laws and the rule of law. The party proposes that it would reorganise and streamline the country's judicial system and the Ministry of Justice, train more judicial officers, and enact a new comprehensive law on criminal procedure and evidence (CoD 1999c:3).

### The role of religion

Although Namibia is a secular country and its Constitution makes no reference to religion except that it protects the right to freedom of such beliefs, a number of political parties stress the importance of God and religion in their party constitutions and manifestos. Two parties in particular, MAG and the UDF, want religion to play a larger role in government and in the Constitution. The UDF (1999b:2) calls itself "a Party of Believers" and states it is concerned that Namibia has become a "Secular State" considering that an estimated 80%-90% of the country's inhabitants are Christian. The party also declares in its constitution that it aims to cooperate more closely with religious bodies (UDF 1999a:2).

MAG is the only party that does not recognise the Constitution because it is a secular document. The party's first aim is for the "sovereignty and guidance of the Holy Trinity" to be recognised in society "as the omnipotent source in the destinies of all peoples, nations and countries" (MAG 2004:3). It promises to work actively towards having the word secular removed from the Constitution.

## G. Social groups

### Boosting labour relations

Many of the political parties stress the importance of workers' rights and labour unions, but their vision of the government's role in labour relations differs dramatically. Most of the large trade unions in Namibia, through the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), are affiliated to the SWAPO Party. The UDF (2000:3) objects to this situation and states it would discourage any political affiliations of trade unions. The DTA (1999b:17) pledges to provide "sound guidelines" based on the principles espoused by the International Labour Organization, a UN agency that seeks to promote social justice and internationally recognised human and labour rights. The DTA (1999b:17-18) also seeks to restrict state interference between employees and employers to a minimum to "ensure the highest possible productivity rate in the economy without any form of exploitation". On the other hand, SWANU (1999a:4) declares it would terminate casualisation, i.e. the replacement of a permanently employed workforce by casual workers, because it "undermines full employment and trade unionism". Similarly, the WRP (1994:4) demands an immediate end to retrenchment, proposing instead to "retrench the bosses".



### Reforming land ownership

The issue of land reform is highly charged in Namibia. The bulk of commercial land remains in the hands of a few thousand, mostly white, farmers. Different groups lay different kinds of claims on the land that they believe is rightfully theirs. It is difficult to determine which groups of people have land rights in a country with a long history of land deprivation that impacted on its many communities. The National Land Conference in 1991 reaffirmed that the restoration of ancestral land rights was out of the question. "The newly elected government announced that the principle of 'willing seller, willing buyer' would form the basis of land acquisition for redistribution, and that no ancestral land claims would be allowed" (Fuller 2004:83). Because many Namibians are unemployed and landless, national debates and strong disagreements continue as regards how the land can best be used and allocated. These strong views are reflected in the various parties' manifestos and constitutions.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:7-8) advocates bringing smallholder farmers into the mainstream of the Namibian economy, redressing past imbalances in the distribution of land as a resource, creating employment, and offering landless citizens an opportunity to reintegrate into society. The CoD (2001:5) proposes a programme of sustainable land and agrarian reform that would ensure the "optimal utilization of our land" by all Namibians, to the benefit of the nation as a whole. The party intends to achieve this through investing in agricultural development, creating a National Drought Relief Fund to assist farmers, modernising agricultural production in the communal areas, and training and equipping farmers for improved productivity and land use (CoD 1999c:6).

The DTA (1999b:11) suggests a conservation strategy that will "guarantee sustained use of the resources" and incentives to ensure productivity is optimised. Furthermore, the party desires resettlement to be sustainable both on an economic and environmental basis (ibid.). The DTA (1999c:8) also proposes that, to secure land tenure of communal land, those who live off such land be granted ownership of it. Similarly, NUDO (2004a:2) commits itself to fighting for land reform and land ownership that would benefit those living on communal land. NUDO (n.d.:1) also seeks to recognise communal land ownership. The UDF (2000:4) prefers that the issue be addressed pragmatically, with a balance between equity and productivity. Furthermore, the party believes there should be a special emphasis on communal farmers, and that "no land should lie idle or underutilised" (ibid.).

### Land redistribution

The parties differ in their views on how private commercial farms and communal land could best be redistributed. Most parties prefer to divide the land in a more equitable fashion, but they also want to ensure that productivity does not suffer.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:8) states its policy is to make farmland available to formerly disadvantaged and landless Namibians through acquiring land in commercial farming areas to resettle the landless. The CoD (1999c:6) promises it would speed up the acquisition of farmland for redistribution to farmers, peasants and farm workers who are at present landless or who farm on marginal lands, and it would accommodate and rehabilitate marginalised communities.

The DTA (1999b:11) proposes that land redistribution be conducted along business principles. Under such a system, prospective farmers would be evaluated after a probationary period before a final allocation of land was made (ibid.). The party states that as many people as possible should benefit from the resettlement scheme, but that preference needs to be given to those that lost traditional lands during the colonial periods (DTA 1999c:8). The UDF (2000:4) touches on the same two issues with a similar approach, saying any government policy should take into account both historical factors and productivity.

SWANU (1999a:3) intends to redistribute land belonging to absentee landlords as well as any "excessive" land to impoverished farmers and farm workers. The party states "excessive, underutilised land shall receive no compensation" (which would be unconstitutional), but that compensation might be paid depending on the nature of the case. It also pledges to put the state's full agricultural expertise at the disposal of impoverished farmers (ibid.).

### Minority rights

Most of the parties, with the exception of MAG, state clearly in their manifestos that they are committed to eliminating discrimination. In respect of discrimination against minority groups in particular, the identification of the groups in question differs dramatically across the parties. The DTA (1999a:2) is the most succinct, by saying it aims to eliminate racial prejudice and all other forms of discrimination. It is rather disturbing to note the party's claim (ibid.) that racial and ethnic identities have become more pronounced than they were at independence. The SWAPO Party (1999a:5) states its commitment to work towards freedom from discrimination on the basis of religion, sex or ethnicity. The UDF (1999a:2) adds language groups and tribal affiliation in its pledge to "fight against racial discrimination in all forms, as well as prejudice and discrimination based on colour, sex, religion, and language or tribal/ethnic affiliation". To this list, NUDO (n.d.:1) adds a political dimension by saying that, in a NUDO-led government, it would not discriminate on the grounds of political affiliation, gender or ethnic origin. The most comprehensive pledge to protect minorities comes from the CoD (2001:5), which includes references to discrimination against homosexuals and foreigners. The party declares it seeks "a society free from all



forms of discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, religious faith or political belief". It would also promote a politically and culturally tolerant society, and would discourage and educate against any chauvinism, especially the bias against women, minorities and foreigners (ibid.).

The RP (2003:4), in a proclaimed bid to provide constructive criticism, states it is opposed to the way in which government's policy of affirmative action has been implemented: "Government creates jobs for their favourites who in most cases are unqualified and inexperienced. We should revert to a system where persons will be appointed on merit only". The RP claims senior government officials also make themselves guilty of blatant racist remarks that go unchecked (ibid.).

#### **Uplifting the role of women**

Those parties that mention gender issues explicitly agree that women are equal to men and need to be treated as such. They argue women need to play greater roles in politics, business and other key sectors of society. Two of these parties, the CoD and the SWAPO Party, profess their commitment to strengthening the role of women in their own party structures. However, the tangible solutions they propose for improving the lives of women are mentioned practically only in relation to the political sphere.

The CoD (2001:1) states it supports and advances gender balance and the complete emancipation and empowerment of women. It urges the country to move faster to a more equal and gender-sensitive society (ibid.). Beyond promoting policies that advance women's interests, the CoD (1999c:7-8) declares that it is committed to gender balance in all of its structures – a commitment it has already implemented in practice – and that it seeks to remove stereotyping about the perceived roles of males and females across society.

The SWAPO Party (1999a:8), on the other hand, declares its goal as being to remove all obstacles hindering the full participation of women in the process of decision-making within the party, the government and society at large. It pledges to help women enter the civil service and says their representation at management levels needs to be improved considerably (ibid.). In fact, the SWAPO Party has a well-known record of promoting women in leadership roles both before and after independence.

The DTA (1999b:7-8) commits itself to the total elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and the promotion of their complete recognition in all spheres of society. The UDF (1999b:6) also says it supports and advances the cause of woman's emancipation. It believes in promoting gender equality and women's active participation in politics, development and nation-building (ibid.).

#### **Pensions**

The five parties that mention pensions in their publications, namely the CoD, the DTA, the SWAPO Party, the UDF and the WRP, all agree that more needs to be done to improve benefits for senior citizens. The CoD (1999a:6) maintains a compassionate government is needed that will seek to alleviate the plight of "our shamefully neglected senior citizens". In their proposal, the pension scheme would be extended to reach 100% coverage of the aged (CoD 1999c:7). The DTA (1999c:7) pledges to provide a financial package that will continually improve for the retired and the aged. The party aims to give senior citizens a "liveable pension", linked to the inflation rate, that would be paid out on a regular basis and in an uncomplicated and safe manner (ibid.). The SWAPO Party (1999a:12) states it intends to continue improving pension benefits as the economy grows. The UDF (1999b:6) declares its intention to "pay serious attention" to the plight of pensioners. It is striking that none of the parties propose how the extra funds will be raised when government coffers are already at very low levels.

#### **Preserving languages**

Since 1990 the official language of Namibia has been English, replacing the principal use of Afrikaans as an official language before then. There are many other languages spoken in Namibia, including Ovambo, Khoekhoe, Herero, Kwangali, Lozi, Tswana, San languages, and German. No political party advocates reverting to Afrikaans or replacing English with one of the other languages, but several parties desire indigenous languages to be protected. The DTA (1999b:6) pledges it would encourage and support the cultivation and maintenance of the various languages and cultures of Namibia as adding to the richness of the national fabric. The UDF (2000:5) intends to keep English the official language, but proposes indigenous languages share equal status with it, thereby encouraging their use. Although many of the manifestos underscore the importance of preserving and using indigenous languages, there are no concrete explanations of how this would come about and what effects it would have on the country and on society.

#### **H. A wealth of new ideas: All things to all people?**

Through comparing the party platforms, the differences between the parties become clearer. The comparison also reveals that the opposition parties have come up with a number of interesting and often creative policy proposals. Although opposition parties do not always explain how the changes they desire can be brought about, nor how they would be funded, they offer interesting ideas that the ruling party and civil society in general may want to consider. The following table compiles a number of policy suggestions extracted from the opposition party platforms, which are noticeably different from those advocated by the ruling SWAPO Party.



It is not clear where these proposals came from, whether they were based on research, public opinion or focus groups, or whether they were derived some other way. In fact, almost all of them are presented without any suggested trade-offs, which begs the question as to how most of them would be funded. In some cases, the ideas may have been put forward to differentiate the party concerned from the SWAPO Party or the government. Either way, there is a wide range of interesting proposals to be found, as Table 3 illustrates.



**Table 3: Interesting ideas proposed in opposition party platforms**

Topic	Party	Idea
<b>Decentralisation</b>	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give Regional Councils the power to control regional government.</li> <li>• Make communities responsible for local affairs.</li> </ul>
<b>Government</b>	CoD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the size of government by cutting down the Cabinet to 15.</li> </ul>
<b>Ministers Corruption</b>	NUDO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibit Permanent secretaries and other members of the civil service from serving on company boards.</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insist on the economic viability of parastatals.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic policy</b>	SWANU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nationalise the fishing industry.</li> <li>• Create public works schemes.</li> </ul>
<b>Tax policy</b>	WRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate VAT.</li> </ul>
<b>Public spending</b>	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce worker shareholding programmes.</li> </ul>
<b>Investments</b>	SWANU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow mining companies to invest only in factories with a majority Namibian shareholding.</li> </ul>
<b>Unemployment</b>	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up a special fund to assist the unemployed.</li> </ul>
<b>Privatisation</b>	SWANU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expropriate any company or enterprise that is exploiting the people and nationalise it.</li> </ul>
<b>Minimum wage</b>	NUDO/SWANU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a national minimum wage linked to inflation.</li> </ul>
<b>Housing</b>	DTA/UDF/WRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide for home ownership for all.</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	CoD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open the debate on women's right to have open reproductive choices.</li> <li>• Bring practitioners of traditional African medicine into mainstream health services.</li> </ul>
	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable treatment even if patient cannot pay for health services.</li> <li>• Restore effective ambulance and emergency services countrywide.</li> </ul>
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	CoD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Declare HIV/AIDS a national emergency.</li> <li>• Reduce the financial burden on those living with HIV/AIDS.</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	SWANU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levy multinational mining and fishing companies to pay for building schools and subsidising free education for all.</li> </ul>
	WRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make schooling mandatory up until matriculation (Grade 12) or the age of 18, whichever comes first.</li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum</b>	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrain all Namibian teachers and use foreigners during training period.</li> </ul>
	SWANU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expel all foreign experts from educational institutions.</li> <li>• Read and study world literature and poetry.</li> </ul>



Topic	Party	Idea
Justice	CoD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include elements of traditional law in the judicial system.</li> </ul>
Religion	MAG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply the Christian doctrine to government structures.</li> <li>• Remove the word secular from the Constitution.</li> </ul>
Labour	SWANU UDF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terminate casualisation.</li> <li>• Discourage the political affiliation of trade unions.</li> </ul>
Agriculture	CoD DTA/NUDO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a Drought Relief Fund to assist farmers.</li> <li>• Grant private tenure over communal lands.</li> </ul>
Resettlement	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate prospective farmers on an economic basis.</li> <li>• Give preference to groups that lost land during the colonial periods.</li> </ul>
Pensions	DTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a pension that keeps up with the inflation rate.</li> <li>• Distribute it in a safe and easy manner.</li> </ul>
Language	UDF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant indigenous languages the same status as English.</li> </ul>

Source: Party manifestos, constitutions and other official documents

## 5. Conclusion

It is clear that the quest for an independent Namibia, both by liberation parties working outside Namibia and the remaining political parties based inside, remains the most important lens through which to view Namibian party politics. The various parties have evolved over a period of more than 40 years, during which time major events took place. These included SWAPO and SWANU moving into exile, the cold war, SWAPO's armed struggle against South African occupation, the UN anointing SWAPO as the "sole authentic" voice of the Namibian people, UN Resolution 435, the SWAPO detainee issue, the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference, the Multiparty Conference, the crumbling of the Eastern bloc countries and, finally, Namibia's long-awaited independence in 1990. All of these events, each in its own way, contributed to how the parties and their positions have evolved over time.

It is also clear that the ruling party moved pragmatically to adjust itself to national and global events as it dedicated itself above all else to independence for Namibia. Thus, it may sometimes seem that the SWAPO Party is a turncoat, switching sides when the situation required it to do so. Since independence, however, and as outlined above in all the different policy areas, the SWAPO Party has generally taken a middle-of-the-road social democratic stance that favours a mixed economy, unity, and human rights and freedoms for all Namibian people.

Opposition party platforms, with the exception of the CoD, DTA and UDF, are thin. This is due to

several reasons. First of all, the ruling party is so dominant that it holds the lion's share of government and parliamentary positions. This has perhaps quelled political discourse because some voters may believe that challenging the SWAPO Party is futile. Because all Cabinet Ministers are selected from the SWAPO Party ranks, it is sometimes difficult to separate the ruling party from government. It may be fair to say that issues are not as important in Namibian politics and elections as they are in other countries with stronger opposition parties, where some of them actually have a good chance of winning and implementing their policies.

Another factor is that most of the political parties, at least initially, identified themselves along tribal or racial lines. Thus, their positions on certain issues were not as important to voters and party members as were other matters like religion, race, ethnicity and personalities. For example, all of the parties have pledged unity and an open membership since independence, but many are still widely seen as favouring one particular ethnic or racial group. This could lead to issues and party positions being subservient to other factors. When looking at the manifestos of the parties (especially the three largest, namely the CoD, DTA and the SWAPO Party), there are interesting policy proposals that set the parties apart; however, the similarities are overwhelmingly greater than the differences.

Like many other African countries, Namibia is in a position where the post-independence ruling party has won – and is expected to continue to win – every election to date. Therefore, when opposition parties publish their ideological positions, they are often, but not always, reactionary in that



they criticise the ruling party on issues such as government size, corruption, land reform, access to health services, and education. When new ideas are suggested by opposition parties – like declaring HIV/AIDS a national emergency, providing home ownership for all and creating drought relief funds – they are rarely accompanied by hard-nosed analysis of where the additional funding would come from.

In addition, opposition party manifestos often criticise the SWAPO Party for having become aloof and removed from the people. These parties pledge that, if elected, they would rule differently from the SWAPO Party; however, their policies and national priorities appear to look largely the same as the current ruling party's. Perhaps the only difference would be the way in which the opposition parties' policies would be implemented. Despite the differences in position that exist between the parties, however, there is no evidence that manifestos make much difference in a country where the politics of personality and liberation credentials are often the deciding factor.

Nonetheless, opposition parties serve another role beyond winning or losing elections: they can also act as "bell-ringers" on key issues. It is striking to note how seldom this happens, however, and one questions why opposition parties do not make more concerted attempts at differentiating themselves from the ruling party. Once they do, a deeper analysis of the trade-offs required for their policy proposals to succeed would be welcomed.





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