

Emerging Trends of Political Competition in Namibia.

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Accepted 30, July, 2026

This paper advances a multi-theoretical interpretation of evolving political competition in Namibia by integrating systems analysis, elite theory, neo-patrimonialism, democratic theory, and institutional perspectives. It argues that intensifying socio-economic pressures especially youth unemployment, governance concerns, and accountability demands enter the political system as decisive inputs that reshape party strategy. The conclusion drawn from this paper is that while contestation has become more generational and issue-driven, elite consolidation, patronage networks, and hybrid formal–informal institutional logics continue to circumscribe pluralism. Data for this paper were obtained from Dr Kulobone's PhD dissertation entitled, **"Analysing the Emerging Trends and Patterns of Political Competition in Namibia's Democratic Landscape: Political Party Systems and Political Elitism Perspectives, 1990-2024."**

Keywords: Political Competition, Namibia Politics, Political Systems Theory, Elite Theory, Neo-Patrimonialism, Democratic Theory, Institutional Theory.

Introduction

The political environment in Namibia still has the echoes of structural inheritances of colonial rule, although the current discussion focuses on how past root causes interrelate with current forces that drive political contests. Experts believe that alongside formal democratic institutions formed during the independence era, there is still a coexistence of established inequalities and unequal political representation, which is partially due to the previous governance arrangements (Freedom House, 2020). According to recent research, younger voters (who represent an increasing demographic group) are starting to perceive political power through the prism of performance and accountability more than liberation credentials, which is an indication of a slow but steady change in the impact of historical narratives on political alignment (Zhang, 2022). This change is supported by the increased access to digital media that undermines the dominant political discourses and allows other political discourses to emerge outside of party frameworks (Lemaire, 2023). Simultaneously, the governance indicators indicate that citizens remain anxious about a lack of transparency, equitable service delivery, and political favouritism, suggesting that old habits of centralised power continue to influence modern political demands (Transparency International, 2020).

In the compilation of these views, the analysis assumes the perspective that although the historical track of Namibia will still be applicable, the analysis will not serve to be a descriptive account, but rather a framework within which the political actors will develop incentives, behaviour, and competitive strategies in the post-independence period. Manifestations of Neo-Patrimonialism in Namibia: Political Patronage and Clientelism. Neo-patrimonialism offers a practical theoretical prism with which the interplay of political allegiance, informal systems of authority, and personal demands in relation to formal democratic practices in Namibia can be explained. Researchers underline that neo-patrimonial systems never substitute formal institutions and instead co-exist with them, forming hybrid forms of governance where citizens perceive political power in terms of personal connections and in terms of constitutional systems (Beekers & van Gool, 2012).

In Namibia, these dynamics are reflected in the expectations that political influence and responsiveness of the state are unevenly allocated, especially among younger voters who pay more and more attention to the performance of policymakers, their transparency, and social inclusion as opposed to the historic legitimacy of the politics in the liberation era (Zhang, 2022). These views are consistent with broader regional findings that show that institutional trust, socioeconomic experience, and perceptions of procedural fairness have significant effects on voter turnout in Southern Africa (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022). The internal party politics of neo-patrimonial systems are also influenced by political patronage that empowers the use of hierarchy and reduces the challenge of authority and candidate selection. General cross-sectional analysis of the major political organisations has revealed that internalised control over decision-making processes is usually centralised to the elite actors, leading to a lack of opportunity to allow the rank-and-file members to have any say over the leadership direction (Blaauw & Zaire, 2023).

This can be witnessed in Namibia, where people regard party structures as significant in deciding who gets access to the political opportunities, influence on policies, and institutional promotion. According to governance ratings, the feeling of unequal representation and irregular responsiveness is persistent among the citizens, and it is a manifestation of a larger conflict between institutional principles and informal structures of political mediation (Transparency International, 2024). State Resources and Personal Networks A second form of neo-patrimonialism has to do with interrelations between formal state organizations and the informal personal relations that mediate access to influence and decision-making. The

literature on theory underlines that in hybrid forms of political organization, there are both institutional politics and informal rules that actors must operate in, with governance structures that are able to be influenced by relational intimacy, ties of trust, and elite coalitions (Mariotti, 2020). Namibia draws on the perceptions of imbalanced access to state institutions, including access to economic opportunities, responsiveness of the administrative systems, and political representation, to explain how citizens tend to utilise the existing socially based networks to make sense of political behaviour (Transparency International, 2024). These images do not reflect structural anomalies but indicate the presence of both institutional and informal processes in the relations between the state and society. They also impact political competition by determining the way the electorate considers the legitimacy of their political actors because a candidate who is considered more receptive to the concerns of the community has a higher chance of having their support in the electoral process. More importantly, the increasing impact of online arenas in the Namibian political discourse has increased the questioning of the perceived disparities in access to state benefits, thus redefining the understanding of the personal networks.

It has been demonstrated that the Namibian young people are progressively involving digital media to evaluate the work of their political leaders, disrupt established narratives, and formulate new demands regarding how they expect their leaders ought to be (Lemaire, 2023). Such a transition makes less use of conventional intermediaries and intensifies direct modes of political participation, thereby pressuring political actors to observe procedural fairness and institutional credibility. With the growing demands towards transparency and equal treatment, neo-patrimonial relations are adjusted in subtle ways: informal networks are still relevant but are becoming more controlled by the pressure on accountability. **Impact on Governance and Development** The interaction of both formal governance and neo-patrimonial tendencies affects the way in which political power is practiced and whether it is challenged, and thereby long-term development patterns and tendencies of democracies' responsiveness in Namibia. Comparative studies indicate that the trust of citizens in the institutions of the state is largely determined by the perception of fairness, accountability, and institutional integrity, which are easily undermined when informal norms are applied in parallel with the rules (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2021). According to survey data in Namibia, young citizens are becoming more concerned with employment opportunities, good service delivery, and open institutions as one of the key performance indicators by political players (Calawa et al., 2023). This change in civic expectations changes the manner in which political competition takes place since it focuses on the daily lives and socioeconomic truths of people as an indicator of political support.

Neo-patrimonial trends are thus not the defining features of state failure but structural mechanisms that alter the meaning of political authority, competition among political players as to the attainment of legitimacy, and voter agency in the democratisation processes. Further, the formalities of democratic norms and informalities of political practices establish asymmetries in the conception and distribution of development benefits, which further shape the expectations and political behaviour of voters. The studies on the engagement of youths indicate that the uncertainties related to socio-economic factors and the feeling of being excluded in politics usually foster the need to challenge the responsiveness of the established institutions, which subsequently encourages a request to have a fairer system of governance (Zhang, 2022). In Namibia, these expectations have become even more acute since civil society and online forms of expression give alternative platforms of political expression to citizens, who find it possible to voice their concerns about governance in ways that do not adhere to conventional political hierarchies. Such shifting expectations put pressure on political actors to pursue more open and performance-based forms of development, the indirect effect of which is the constrained neo-patrimonial propensity by reducing the utility of strictly informal methods of political mobilisation. The current work thus considers the effects of neo-patrimonialism in governance and development not as a pattern of determination but as a dynamic relationship between structural legacies, institutional framework as well as changing expectations of citizens that define the competition dynamics of Namibia's political arena.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which was most appropriate given its focus on analysing the emerging trends and patterns of political competition in Namibia's democratic landscape from 1990 to 2024 (Mweshi, 2020). The central aim was not to measure variables statistically but rather to explore the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of political actors, institutions, and communities as they navigate Namibia's evolving democratic processes. According to Bellagambi et al. (2020), qualitative research is well-suited for studies that seek to understand how individuals interpret their social and political realities, thereby providing depth and context beyond numerical generalisations.

The choice of a qualitative approach was justified on two principal grounds (Luo, 2020). First, the study sought to capture the nuanced and context-specific dynamics of political competition and elitism in Namibia — phenomena that are best understood through rich narrative accounts and contextual analysis rather than through the reduction of complex social processes to countable units. Second, political competition is a complex and evolving process influenced by historical legacies, socio-economic structures, and cultural narratives, all of which required a research strategy that privileges interpretation over measurement.

The research was anchored in interpretivism, which holds that reality is socially constructed and can only be understood through the perspectives of those experiencing it (Saunders, 2023). Within this paradigm, the role of the researcher is not to remain detached, as in positivism, but to interpret the meanings and subjective realities of participants (Divakar, 2021). This was critical for the current study, as political competition and elitism in Namibia cannot be divorced from the interpretations and lived realities of politicians, voters, and other stakeholders. Interpretivism therefore provides philosophical grounding for understanding how different actors perceive issues such as party dominance, electoral participation, and the concentration of power among elites.

Aligned with interpretivism, this study adopted an inductive research approach. Induction emphasises building theory from the ground up by moving from specific observations to broader generalisations (Veloze et al., 2022). Although the study did not seek to formulate a new theory, it adopted an inductive approach because the analysis was grounded in empirical evidence and allowed patterns and themes to emerge from the data. These emergent insights were then interpreted in light of existing theoretical perspectives — Political Systems Theory and Elite Theory thereby enriching

their application to the Namibian democratic context. As Kunimasa et al. (2022) emphasises, inductive inquiry provides the flexibility to capture unexpected dynamics and new trajectories that may not be visible under a deductive, hypothesis-testing model.

Padilla-Díaz (2020) underscores the value of qualitative research in political science and democratic studies. Kunimasa et al. (2022) argue that qualitative approaches are indispensable for examining phenomena where human interpretation, institutional dynamics, and historical processes play central roles. Similarly, Bellagambi et al. (2020) maintain that qualitative inquiry allows for a deeper interrogation of power relations, social meanings, and institutional practices — all of which are crucial in understanding Namibia's political competition. By employing interpretivism and an inductive approach, this study ensured that its findings reflected the authentic voices, lived experiences, and historical realities that shape Namibia's democratic journey (Ha, 2022).

The qualitative method is not the second-best substitute for data that could not be collected quantitatively. It is the **primary and most appropriate means** of accessing the kinds of knowledge this study requires — the insider accounts, the contextual judgements, and the interpretive insights of those who have lived and shaped Namibia's democratic politics.

Emerging Issues in Namibian Politics: A Political Systems Theory Analysis

The political systems theory offers a critical background to the analysis of the organisation, behaviour, and adaptive capacity of political competition in Namibia, as it describes politics as a dynamic and ongoing relationship amidst societal pressures, institutional responses, and legitimacy outcomes. As opposed to isolating political action by electoral activity or leadership action, Easton has placed the political system as an interrelationship of competing demands, values, and expectations that flow and influence political outcomes. Researchers in youth engagement and civic participation in Southern Africa emphasize the importance of the alterations in social expectations in shaping trends of political participation, where the transformation of media ecosystems, job opportunities, and faith in institutions critically affect how individuals convey their political preferences (Walther et al., 2023).

These points are very close to the main idea expressed by Easton that the stability of the political competition is linked with the capacity of the system to process the pressures created by citizens, interest groups, changes in society, and so on. The emphasis on the continuity between the inputs and the outputs of the society and the responses of its institutions, Political Systems Theory provides a framework that can be used to explain both how the political competition in Namibia has changed since its independence, and why certain types of competition develop or become disputed over time. The rationality of the framework proposed by Easton is especially applicable to the situation when political competition is viewed through the prism of the continuous existence of socio-economic inequality and demographic changes affecting it.

Several studies indicate that young people in Southern Africa are progressively expressing their dissatisfaction with joblessness, marginalization, and institutional withholding, as an indication of a wider discontent regarding the attentiveness of democratic institutions (Zhang, 2022). These feelings are not mere expressions of social observation but are pressures that are politico-practical or have a political effect on the political system. National survey reports in Namibia over the years have shown that job creation, corruption issues, and loss of trust in the populace institutions are among the top priorities of most citizens, especially younger adults who are not in touch with politics as their earlier counterparts were (Mpako & Ndoma, 2024). Through Political Systems Theory, these issues are cyclic forces that can fuel the political competition when political parties are forced to show responsiveness, change the policy propositions, and redefine the relationship with various constituencies.

This systemic approach is vital in the Namibia scenario, where democratic stability has always been coupled with increasing pressure for accountability and socioeconomic reform. It is on this scale that the research understands political rivalry as a dynamic interplay among the social forces and institutional change. One of the main strong points of the political systems theory is that it explains how the introduction of new political priorities transforms the political environment, especially in situations when some political parties have traditionally had “guaranteed” electoral benefits. The change in the attitude of people towards the issue of unemployment, corruption, and marginalisation of the youths has been an issue that has increasingly undermined the usual trends of political loyalty in Namibia.

Research on youth engagement has pointed out that the young Namibians have become overly dependent on the mass media and digital platforms to air their grievances and mobilise over the political matters, which means the creation of new avenues of making demands to the political system (Keulder, 2021). Such pressures have not only affected the political dialogue but have created some form of changes in the way parties' position, policy promises, and how they deal with constituencies. In those cases where institutional responses seem weak, e.g., in the field of job creation, or in the area of corruption image, social trust may decline and change the competition balance between parties. The relevance of the political systems theory will get even more evident with the focus on the institutional aspect of political competition.

Southern African political institutions, such as electoral agencies, political parties, and government agencies, are very instrumental in mediating societal pressures and influencing the political outcomes. Relative studies on voter turnout indicate that the performance of the institution, administrative credibility, and views on fairness also affect political participation and contestability within the region (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022). In Namibia, the differences in trust in institutions like local councils, ministries, and political parties determine how people participate and how competitive they are, indicating that the political system is just able to meet the needs of the society unequally. The political systems theory does not view these differences as failures of actors but as systemic disequilibrium in the flow of demands and responses. In cases where people view institutions as responsive, competition in politics is more likely to stabilise on the issue of programmes to be executed and the policy agendas.

On the other hand, once institutions fail to handle issues, the level of dissatisfaction rises, creating new pressures that remake the political involvement. This iterative exchange is captured by the model proposed by Easton that shows how the nature of institutional responsiveness (or the absence thereof) comes to play in the nature and strength of political competition. During the framework used by Easton, feedback can be seen as how people judge institutional decisions and how such judgment can guide future demands and political behaviours. In Namibia, feedback is getting more noticeable as the level of criticism towards corruption, the level of demand to review the system, and even discontent is vented

through civic activism. The literature on the topic of youth mobilisation in Africa emphasises the way the youth express discontent with the performance of the institutions through social media and open protests, which marks the beginning of the new feedback channels (Oosterom & Gukurume, 2023).

The reactions are not just statements of dissatisfaction; they influence the demands that political parties will have to follow to stay competitive. Political Systems Theory makes such feedback a key characteristic of the political evolution, and it states that the systems should feedback on the evaluations of the population to maintain legitimacy. The increasing youth unemployment and accountability issues in Namibia have created the need to change the message and the organisational behaviour of both the ruling and the opposition parties. These developments, as considered in the analysis of Easton, show that there is systemic pressure under which political actors are responding to changing feedback in the context of an increasingly assertive constituency. The Political Systems Theory, therefore, allows this work to observe political competition as a cyclical process, based on feedback mechanisms and not on final electoral results.

Moreover, the political systems theory is an interpretive framework to be used in the analysis of the appearance of new political players and concerns in the Namibian competitive environment. The growth of other civic organisations, independent individuals, and social movements led by the youths is a systemic fracture that has been brought about by unmet needs in society. Such trends are congruent with ecological trends in the area where young citizens are becoming more and more skeptical of the validity of traditional political institutions and are pursuing alternative means of engagement (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2021). When the institutions do not implement these emerging voices, a change in the pattern of participation is observed in the political systems, which can either increase the political competition or disengagement. The framework developed by Easton theorises such developments as systemic adjustment moments when the political system must re-adjust to new pressures.

In Namibia, the effects of these pressures are especially noticeable in the falling turnout of younger generations to the polls and in the emergence of civic activism on matters of employment and governance changes. The political systems theory explains the emergence of such trends: they are due to the fact that the old political systems are not able to completely accommodate the evolving social demands. Also, political systems theory is a supplement to the empirical evidence that is available concerning the perceptions of corruption, political trust, and the level of governance recorded in various governance assessments.

Transparency organisations and rankings indicators also indicate the consistent finding that the perceptions of corruption and trust in governmental bodies affect political engagement behaviour throughout the African democracies (Freedom House, 2020). These pointers are warning signs of larger societal issues that come into politics as holders of accountability. In Namibia, these issues have led to the intensification of the political discussions that deal with transparency, procurement procedures, and the reform of governance. The model by Easton explains these developments as a systemic process of how expectations in society are met by institutional performance. The lack of political decisions, in turn, leads to failure to cover such concerns, which opens the opportunities for a more intense political competition.

Emerging Trends and Patterns of Political Competition in Namibia: An Elite Theory Lens

The elite theory provides a critical analysis perspective to understanding the manner in which political power has been amassed, maintained, and replicated through the different generations of political leaders in Namibia. Instead of knowing political competition as that of open competition between actors whose positions are equally positioned, Elite Theory anticipates the structural asymmetries that enable a relatively small group to control decision-making processes. According to scholars, hegemony by elites is perpetuated not only by institutional power but also by their control of political discourses, access to state resources, and the capacity to influence the views of people regarding the way of governance (Mariotti, 2020). Analytically, Elite Theory can be useful as it focuses on how the elite groups manage to stay cohesive and adapt to the forces of society.

Southern African comparative scholarship illustrates that political elites tend to bargain their existence by redefining alliances, managing information access, and selectively integrating new constituencies like youth or civil society participants (Damele & Campos, 2022). In Namibia, the same dynamics are evident in the periodic involvement of the youth structures in political leadership, the consultation of the traditional authorities, and the use of national development consultations in projecting responsiveness. The results of the Afrobarometer point to a pattern of increasing demands of the younger citizens that elite performance can be judged based on transparency, job creation, and service delivery, indicating the spheres where the elite narratives may be either compatible or in conflict with the actual socio-economic conditions (Mpako & Ndoma, 2024). The Elite Theory explains such changes not as mere shifts in voter mood, but as structural demands which elites have to effectively cope with.

This inclination practically balances Elite Theory and the systemic knowledge of Political Systems Theory, which contributes positively to the consistency of the overall theoretical framework. According to scholars who study the topic of democratic participation in Africa, the emergent groups of people, especially the youth and women, are blocked structurally from joining the formal political leadership by entrenching norms and gatekeeping practices by the elites (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2021). The youths in Namibia often complain that they have little or no access to meaningful political participation, though political awareness is high owing to social media and internet-based platforms. According to Keulder (2021), there has been a remarkable increase in youth involvement by using mass media and online activism, which are not always reflected in an official involvement in political leadership.

Elite Theory is the conceptual framework that gives meaning to this trend as an intentional practice of elite domination and not necessarily as a coincidence or some undue limitation of resources. Elite Theory provides an insight into how political elites manipulate the discussion of political matters, shape the policy agenda, and even frame political competition in a manner that strengthens their positions, too. Studies of youth political disengagement show that the politically constructed discourses by elites have a strong influence on whether or not the emerging constituencies find the political system to be legitimate or exclusionary (Zhang, 2022). In Namibia, when the political discourse of election periods focuses on the theme of national unity, liberation history, and economic stability, the message might be well received by older national generations but fails to be very relevant to the issues of younger citizens, who are more interested in issues of

employment and urbanisation, and digital inclusion.

The research conducted on digital mobilisations in Africa, including the case of the EndSARS movement in Nigeria, demonstrates how young people dismantle the elite-centric discourses of accountability and responsiveness by intensifying the other discourses (Udenze et al., 2024). The Elite Theory enables the current research to contextualize those changing discursive patterns as a subset of more general processes of political competition in which older elites strive to maintain their hegemony in the discourse and newer groups introduce novel forms of political language. The fundamental analytical capability of Elite Theory lies in its ability to expose the manner in which elite hegemony is conceived by even those formal democracies. African democracies often display a tendency in which electoral institutions are present, whereas the distribution of political power is limited to networks (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022).

The presence of competitive elections in Namibia is accompanied by the elite domination of the candidates' selection process, agenda-setting, and parliamentary decision-making processes. According to Transparency International (2020), the perception of corruption and absence of accountability are the regular problems of the Namibian population, which prompts the assumption that the institutional systems, which are aimed at restraining the power of elites, might not be strong enough. Elite Theory helps explain such observations by putting them into the context of elite continuity as opposed to the idiosyncratic institutional failures. Elite Theory also throws more light on the strategic responses of political elites toward demands of accountability, reform, and inclusion. Empirical studies in Southern Africa indicate that elite groups tend to make symbolic displays of reform, including public consultations, anti-corruption language, or youth policy promises, and at the same time maintain elite power formations (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2021).

Lemaire (2023) shows that in some cases, the elites in Africa are trying to regulate or control digital spaces to ensure that they handle the criticism of people instead of having a participatory dialogue. The use of Elite Theory in Namibia allows the research to explain similar actions, such as the involvement of political elites with the youth development agendas or public transparency issues, as well as the strategic measures to negotiate their legitimacy instead of the actual structural change. In addition, Elite Theory can be used to understand the reasons why some political issues are common in the competitive Namibian political setting, whereas some are marginal. Elite groups often give priority to issues that strengthen their position or form a block of support amid their major constituencies. Indicatively, according to the Afrobarometer reports, the creation of jobs and corruption are always among the most important concerns of the people, but the rate of policy changes within these areas is usually slow.

In terms of an elite theory, this disconnection can be a manifestation of elite calculations, which are profitable to uphold some political or economic status quo, despite its negative impact on the expectations of a larger population (Mpako & Ndoma, 2024). Calawa et al., (2023) emphasize the idea that youth in various nations perceive the disconnection between elite rhetoric and policy practice as a factor that is leading to disengagement or choosing not to act in politics. Lastly, elite theory enables one to explain the new changes in the political contest of Namibia in terms of the changing elite logics. The increasing mobilisation of youth, the dwindling voter turnout, and the increasing criticisms of the elites by the mass media, as well as the entry of some new players in the political arena, including independent candidates or civic movements, are all pressures that the elites need to negotiate. Walther et al., (2023) claim that youth activism, especially the one empowered by digital tools, confronts the conventional systems of elite power by suggesting other avenues of political impact.

Keulder (2021) also observes that media platforms have become focal in influencing political consciousness among young people, and hence, the informational environment under which the elites operate is changed. The elite theory uses the above developments to conceptualise the changes as reflective of changing elite citizen relations and not just new political trends. This observation reinforces the analytical logic of the study as it connects patterns in politics to the behaviour of elites directly instead of explaining it by structural or other institutional factors. Neo-Patrimonialism in Namibia. This study uses neo-patrimonialism as a conceptual framework in the interpretation of the way in which informal political practices interact with formal democratic institutions in Namibia to determine the nature and the degree of political competition. Modern scholars refer to neo-patrimonial arrangements as hybrids where personal loyalty systems, selective distribution of resources, and informal power are found to exist and compete with constitutional regulations and bureaucratic standards (Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2020).

The result of these hybrids is that they tend to create political spaces in which incumbency gets entrenched structurally by having control over state resources and administrative apparatuses. Historians stress that neo-patrimonialism does not dictate the elite behaviour solely, but the general trends of accountability due to the fact that the political players in the game of neo-patrimonialism focus more on the obligations of relationships than the impersonal institutional regulation (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022). These criticisms demonstrate how governance through rules has been undermined, but other critics observe that hybrid forms of governance still may be capable of a few areas of electoral competitiveness and citizen voice, at least under the condition that democratic norms are still appreciated by society (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2021). To further the analysis, the paper does not view neo-patrimonialism as an analytical category but rather as a vibrant explanatory framework for explaining the changing political situation in Namibia.

In Namibia, the concept of neo-patrimonialism can be proven truly relevant in the context of the centralisation of political power and the perceived mediation of access to governmental opportunities by connections through networks of contacts with decision-makers. Governance indicators as well as Afrobarometer data provide an insight into the continued worries of the population about the unequal responsiveness of the public institutions and the beliefs in favorable access to state incentives (Afrobarometer, 2024). These processes are reflective of larger-regional trends wherein hybrid forms of governance retain formal electoral rivalry but organize political rewards along the lines of loyalty-based communication (Oosterom & Gukurume, 2023). Meanwhile, qualitative literature on citizen engagement shows that political players tend to mobilise constituencies based on symbolic identification, specific benefits, or relational proximity, thus re-creating structures that benefit incumbents (Calawa et al., 2023).

This point of view enhances the theoretical pertinence of neo-patrimonialism to the research as they demonstrate how informal activities and resource-based relationships influence the competitiveness of elections, the power of party substitutions, and the sustainability of political dominance in Namibia. Another way that neo-patrimonialism can be used to explain the interaction between societal expectations and informal power structures is through the interaction between

the two. Researchers believe that the increasing youth political awareness due to socio-economic factors, online communication, and increasing demands of accountability puts new pressure on the hybrid system, making it difficult to assimilate (Udenze et al., 2024). According to a recent survey conducted in Namibia, there has been an increasing disparity between citizen expectations and political performance, especially among younger generations that tend to doubt the fairness of resource allocation and the political leadership transparency (Mpako & Ndoma, 2024).

It is consistent with the comparative results in Southern Africa that indicate that, despite the partiality of neo-patrimonial systems, they are prone to changes in public opinion and mobilisation pressures (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2021). Lastly, neo-patrimonialism also helps form the theoretical basis by providing information on the structural motivations that allow formal democratic institutions to co-exist with discursively limited political pluralism. Anti-corruption and governance indexes are regularly used to address the issues of the transparency of the decision-making procedure and unequal allocation of public resources in hybrid regimes (Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2020). These governance evaluations go hand in hand with sociological measurements that show that political actors tend to move between formal and informal networks in order to maintain their strategic positions, thus influencing the institutionalisation of competition (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022). Neo-patrimonialism is thus a very important theoretical construct to explain the organization but unequal, open but elite-mediated, procedurally but substantively constrained political competition in Namibia.

Contemporary Namibian Politics and Neo-patrimonialism

Neo-patrimonialism has an analytical significance to the political competition in Namibia in explaining the coexistence of informal norms and the existence of democratic institutions to exert influence over political incentives, elite behaviour, and voter strategies. The recent studies about dominant-party environments indicate that internal elite integration, organisational regulation, and hierarchical decision-making are still the key processes through which political power is bargained (Blaauw & Zaire, 2023). In Namibia, even though liberation-era political institutions have proved to be resilient, voter demands (especially among the youth) have increased criticism of the performance of governance, openness, and democracy (Afrobarometer, 2024). In that way, neo-patrimonialism is a crucial approach to studying the way in which political competition is developing in the context of the hybrid political system in Namibia.

Further, the theoretical explanations inspired by neo-patrimonial theory help to understand the further contradictions between institutional legacy and modern politics more broadly, which makes it possible to realize the topicality of studying the informal processes underlying electoral competition. The emergence of digital connectivity, generational transformation, and civic activism is transforming the nature of how legitimacy is constructed and how voters interact with political institutions (Lemaire, 2023). The paper then concludes that neo-patrimonialism must be understood as a dynamic and adaptive institution- one that responds to socio-economic shifts, demographic transformations, and the development of new democratic standards to define the new patterns of political competition in Namibia.

Democratic Theoretical Foundation of Namibian Politics

The democratic theory offers a broad basis for studying the interaction of authority, participation, and legitimacy in political systems, and it is therefore critical in studying the development of political competition in Namibia. Scholars highlight that the current democratic systems are based on the interaction of institutional regulations, citizen participation, and elite behaviour that determine the character of political contention (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022). Democratic theory argues that political legitimacy will arise out of consent of the people who are governed, which will be manifested by ordinary elections, political pluralism and responsible forms of governance. Nonetheless, according to researchers, democratic practice is not always consistent or unconditional; it is determined by differences in political culture, institutional structure, and social expectations in the context (Tambe, 2021).

The dynamics of Namibia include the continuation of dominant-party politics and growing citizen demands for responsiveness and fairness in the process, which indicates that political competition should be examined not only on electoral results but also on the overall democratic process that makes power legitimate and undermines legitimacy. Democratic theory also sheds light on the competitiveness of a political system when it comes to political participation. The Southern African experience of empirical research illustrates that the desire of people, especially the youth, to participate in politics is determined by generational changes, economic conditions, and attitudes towards the government (Calawa et al., 2023). In Namibia, opinion polls indicate that there is an increasing demand for job creation, transparency of institutions, and opportunities shared equally, which altogether alter the competition of legitimate actors (Mpako & Ndoma, 2024).

The democratic theory thus offers a conceptual framework for explaining the impact of demand for participation and accountability on voter alignment, party politics, and citizens' trust in institutions. The Afrobarometer data on Namibia demonstrates how the decreasing satisfaction with service provision and the increasing youth activism are giving a response to the political system, thus affecting party behaviour and fueling the competition (Afrobarometer, 2024). Democratic theory supports the idea expressed by Easton since the system of political outputs (policies, representation, and institutional performance) should serve the interests of the citizens in accordance with the expectation of normative predictability to ensure that the system remains valid. In situations where political competition seems unequal or unresponsive, the democratic theory expects dissent and mobilisation of certain groups of people who seem to feel neglected and marginalized in political decision-making procedures in the past.

Both paradigms agree on the way the Namibian political system copes with shifting social expectations, either gradually or in retaliation. Elite Theory also adds another depth of analysis by describing the mediation of political competition by the behaviour and strategic interests of political elites. Scientists underline that in democratic regimes, political elites tend to have disproportionate power in terms of resource distribution, the creation of an agenda, and institutional organization (Auerbach, 2022). The prevailing political party in Namibia, SWAPO, in the last three decades has not only been chosen by people but also has the capacity to organise, historical legitimacy, and networks of elites, which influence political competition (Blaauw & Zaire, 2023). Democratic theory overlaps with the Elite Theory because it acknowledges that

although the aim of democracy is political equality, the structures of elites tend to set the limits within which the political game is played.

This interaction is the reason why political contestation in Namibia has, in recent times, grown stronger: the growing expectations of youth, the increased access to information via digital means, and accountability concerns have put new strain on elite structures, but at the same time revealed internal fracturing. Based on this, the combination of the democratic theory and the Systems Theory, and the Elite Theory as developed by Easton, offers a more detailed contextualisation of the changing trends in Namibian politics in terms of political competition. Democratic Principles and the Competitiveness of Namibian Politics Democratic theory also recognises political equality, accountability, representation, and citizen participation as the fundamental principles that constitute competitive democracies. Political equality in Namibia is constitutionally guaranteed, but the realisation of the principle is determined by structural imbalances between the party forces, access to political resources, and unequal participation among demographic groups (Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2020).

The youth involvement trends in specific cases illustrate how the sense of exclusion or decrease in responsiveness can change the competitive landscape due to the destabilization of the traditional party allegiances and the urge to explore the option of other political leaders (Lemaire, 2023). Democratic theory is one that foresees that the greater these perceptions become embedded, the more will be the political competition being contested, diverse, and issue-oriented as opposed to being identity-based or history-based. This trend is becoming more pronounced in Namibian electoral politics, in which the urban youth are declining their trust in entrenched political elites in support of the creation of employment, social accountability, and policy performance as an indicator of political choice. Democratic theory also points out the influence of accountability mechanisms on political competition in that the elites are expected to act in accordance with the demands of the population. In Namibia, instances of dissatisfaction with governance, the issue of transparency, and the response of the citizens to high-profile corruption cases support the democratic theory that legitimacy is an issue of visible responsiveness among political actors (Global Corruption Barometer, 2020). With the growth of civil society activism and the acceleration of mobilisation in the digital era, the political landscape is increasingly competitive, compelling old parties to adjust their way of doing things to remain relevant.

The democratic theory can thus be used to offer a conceptual explanation for why Namibia is witnessing a change in the political contestation from the historically dominant-party paradigm towards a more pluralised competitive environment. The elite theory is a vital analytical tool when it comes to understanding the dynamics of political competition in Namibia in terms of structures that are defined by concentrated power and selective access to decision process. Both classical and modern theorists underline that political systems are conducive to a minority group of people that have a disproportional impact on institutional output, the distribution of resources, and the shape of agendas (Damele & Campos, 2022). Another reason that scholars believe should determine the sustainability of democratic regimes is their ability to negotiate internal cohesiveness, succession, and respond to changes in civil expectations, as elites (Toscano & Stolz, 2024).

Based on these theoretical presuppositions, the elite theory assists in explaining why the predominant-party systems, including the Namibian one, tend to stabilize, but with uneven competition. Surveys among Southern African citizens indicate that as the liberation movements become the ruling parties, the elite structures are likely to consolidate the organizational control, centralize the power, and create the ideological discourses to support the political legitimacy (Carvalho & Taylor, 2022). Political competition in these situations is not organized as much by having more than one plausible alternative, but rather by the capacity of elites to control infighting, preserve ties of patronage, and manipulate the circulation of political information. This finding is consistent with the larger literature on elite power in post-colonial states, which indicates that only when elite cohesion is undermined, when there are changes in the expectations of the populace, or when other elite groups come into existence by mobilising civil societies or succeeding generations, do elite competitive pressures become strong (Zhang, 2022).

Using these findings on Namibia enables the investigation to theorise the effects of elite-motivated incentives and constraints on the strategic behaviour of parties and candidates. Elite theory can also be used to explain how the nature of citizen and elite relations is shifting and how this affects political competition. Empirical studies in Southern Africa indicate that when younger generations are more and more skeptical of elite legitimacy, insist on open governance, and organise themselves and their activities via digital means, the established mechanisms by which the elites uphold their power become less efficient (Lemaire, 2023). Similar trends in Namibia have helped to bring a slow change to the political environment, where non-traditional actors are provided with more room in the political space due to new information channels and civil movements. Elite theory suggests that these kinds of developments do not instantly democratise the competition space, but instead, they present strains that existing elites will have to navigate through moderating their public communication, maintaining domestic cohesion, and balancing new demands on their power. This process is consistent with theories of elite adaptation, which propose that the competition among political players not only increases due to the new actors entering politics, but also because the old elites change their strategies in line with the evolving societal demands (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022).

Another impact of the elite theory is that it explains the interaction of institutional design with elite behaviour in influencing the nature of operations of political rivalry. According to scholars, formal institutions like electoral commissions, legislatures, and courts operate in elite-controlled settings in which their autonomy, mandate, and performance are manifested in the larger distribution of elite power (Marshfield, 2019). In these environments, election competitiveness is not just determined by rules but also through elite control in the selection of candidates, the provision of campaign materials, and the political message. The analysis of emerging democracies points to the fact that, despite the procedural quality of elections, control of the institutional structure by elites can reduce the possible set of viable political options and the equalising impact democratic theory predicts (Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2020).

Elite theory is also useful in providing the continuity of political fragmentation in opposition parties and movements. Competitive analysis of politics has shown that weaker opposition parties tend to have difficulties consolidating power when the elites dominate the allocated resources, framing of political ideologies, and even the internal political organization of parties (Breindl, 2020). Elite theory views such fragmentation not as a failure by the political actors, but rather as a consequence of elite-managed environments, which are conducive to incumbents and restrict the political space within

which the opposition elite can organise. In Namibia, changes in voting patterns, especially among the youth and urban areas, also indicate the beginning of other elite networks that strive to replace the status quo. Elite theory would suggest that such competitions can redefine political warfare when newer elites establish organisations that are coherent enough to support long-term impact and consequently change the overall elitist structure as opposed to just infiltrating it (Zhang, 2022).

Through these theoretical alignments of strands, the elite theory offers a conceptual rationale of political competition in Namibia, in a way that the elite cohesion, elite circulation, and elite responsiveness to the demands of society have influenced the political competition. Elite theory is thus a critical theory through which trends in Namibian politics can be theorised, where analytical connections are established between institutional behaviour, mobilisation of citizens, and the elite in adapting their strategies. In the *Political Parties' Strategies and Behaviours: An Institutional Perspective*, the institutional theory provides a crucial analytical framework concerning the way political parties in a democratic setting develop strategy, change their behaviour, and place themselves in the competitive electoral environment. It is stressed by academics that institutions, which consist of formal rules and set norms, as well as time-honored expectations of behaviour, define the incentives and limitations within which political actors act (Theuns, 2019). Empirical studies in emerging democracies also reveal that strategic space may be expanded or constricted due to institutional structures, contributing to the choice of either consensus-seeking or coalition-building, or adversarial strategies in contestation (Damele & Campos, 2022). One crucial contribution of the institutional theory is the fact that it explains how political institutions limit and facilitate strategic choices among parties. Comparative results indicate that in consensus-based systems, parties tend to tend toward broad-appeal tactics and moderate ideological stances and policy framing that minimizes voter uncertainty, especially where political survival entails cross-group acceptability (Mohanty & Sood, 2016).

The same scholars state that institutionalised democracies decrease the chances of intense inter-party struggle since parties expect the costs of reputations and public scrutiny (Damele & Campos, 2022). The embeddedness of the parties in the systems of formal and informal rules also gives an opportunity to understand the political competition in terms of institutional theory. Studies of voting in Southern Africa show that institutional aspects, including electoral systems, media control, and mobilisation avenues, can have a dramatic impact on the way people process party credibility and the ways parties can customise their strategies (Reichenberg & Tambe, 2022). More research suggests that perceived institutional settings with less openness or less participation tend to result in diverse magnitudes of youth participation and voter turnout, and it has implications for the competitiveness of the electoral procedure (Global Corruption Barometer, 2020).

The other institutional theory aspect that adds to the analysis of political competition is the focus on path dependence and the institutional effects that remain with time. According to scholarship, institutional decisions made at the initial stages of the institution, usually at decisive political moments, leave a path that affects political behavior long after its establishment (Baliamoune-Lutz, 2020). These institutional legacies can stabilise dominant-party systems, organise opposition fragmentation, and define the level of ideological variety in the political arena (Bracco et al., 2013). These lessons are important to theorising political competition in Namibia since they remind us that the trends in party strategy, coalition structures, and voter mobilisation are not only recent phenomena, but also representative of underlying institutional processes that shape the politics of the country. The institutional theory also explains the processes in which institutional set-ups reshape intra-party behaviour, candidate selection, and how internal dissent is handled. The analysis of the new democracies shows that parties tend to formalise leadership routes, decision-making procedures, and disciplinary systems that define who rises to the party ranks and how one solves internal disputes (Walther et al., 2023). Such processes influence the general competitiveness of the political arena by influencing the organisational resilience of parties, their strategy, and adaptability to societal pressure (Udenze et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The paper concludes that political competition in Namibia is becoming more issue-based, generational, and performance-driven, yet remains constrained by elite consolidation, hybrid governance patterns, and institutional continuities. The interplay of citizen pressures, elite adaptation, and institutional structures suggests that Namibia's political environment is entering a period of gradual but meaningful transformation. The future of political contestation will depend on how effectively political actors respond to shifting socio-economic demands, accommodate emerging voices, and strengthen democratic accountability within this hybrid system.

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