

A Comparative Analysis of Political Competition in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa.

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This article undertakes a comparative and longitudinal analysis of trends and patterns of political competition in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa, focusing on the evolution of liberation-movement dominance in post-independence Southern Africa. Grounded in dominant-party theory, elite theory, democratic consolidation, and competitive authoritarianism, the study argues that shared liberation histories have not produced uniform political outcomes. Instead, political competition has diverged across the three cases as a result of differences in institutional design, elite cohesion, socio-economic performance, and opposition capacity. Angola is analysed as a case of constrained pluralism, where centralised executive authority, elite consolidation, and control over state resources have limited meaningful contestation despite regular elections. Namibia is positioned as a hybrid case, combining relatively stable democratic institutions with enduring structural advantages for the ruling party rooted in liberation legitimacy and incumbency. South Africa, by contrast, reflects a more open and fluid competitive environment, marked by declining ruling-party dominance, electoral fragmentation, and the emergence of coalition politics.

Using electoral data spanning from the early transition period to the 2024 elections, the article historicises Namibia's political trajectory while situating it comparatively between Angola's competitive authoritarian tendencies and South Africa's expanding pluralism. The analysis demonstrates that liberation credentials alone are insufficient to sustain long-term political dominance. Instead, ruling-party survival increasingly depends on governance performance, elite adaptability, internal cohesion, and responsiveness to socio-economic pressures, particularly youth unemployment and urban discontent. External shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and leadership transitions have further exposed the vulnerabilities of dominant-party systems across the region. The article contributes to comparative African politics by showing that political competition in post-liberation states is dynamic rather than static, shaped by the interaction between historical legacies and contemporary democratic demands, and increasingly characterised by gradual erosion rather than abrupt collapse of dominant-party rule.

Keywords: Dominant-party systems, Democratic consolidation, Competitive authoritarianism, Liberation movements, Elite cohesion, Institutional design, Incumbency advantage, Political pluralism, Electoral competitiveness, Opposition fragmentation, Youth political mobilisation, Socio-economic legitimacy, Angola politics, Namibia political system, South Africa electoral dynamics, Coalition politics, Leadership succession, COVID-19 political effects, Voter realignment.

Introduction

The comparative study of the Angolan, Namibian, and South African political competition provides a good prospect to study how the dominance of the liberation-movements evolves within the variations of the political system. Although these states followed similar anti-colonial paths, their modern party structures differ in important ways, which makes them well suited to comparative analysis. It makes sense to place the analysis inside debates about the dominant-party system, democratic consolidation, and competitive authoritarianism, which offers a consistent analytical prism through which to understand the reasons why certain ruling parties continue to hold power unabated, and others are becoming increasingly fractured.

Angola exhibits the traits that are normally attributed to limited political competition, whereby the incumbency advantage and centralised power restrain effective contestation. Namibia is a controlled form of dominance where electoral contests do exist, but they are skewed due to institutional configurations and based on the historical validity of the ruling party. South Africa, in turn, is indicative of a changing environment where a once dominant party is recording a steady loss in elections with an ever-increasing competitiveness in opposition. The comparative approach to the study of these cases, as opposed to a descriptive approach, allows the study to transcend chronologically-based narratives to seek answers to the manner in which institutional design, capacity of opposition, state-society relations, and socio-economic pressures interact to form political competition. This strategy helps in developing further insight into the conditions that perpetuate or diminish the party supremacy within the political systems of Southern Africa.

Liberation and Dominance

The liberation movements in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa had inherited a large amount of organisational, ideological, and symbolic capital during the period of independence, which allowed them to effectively consolidate their authority and create dominant-party systems in one form or another. Each setting was a result of a unique colonial experience, but the ruling forces, MPLA, SWAPO, and the ANC, shifted from an armed struggle to a political establishment with a high degree of claims to historical legitimacy, a trend that is commonly observed in the African political competition literature (Beardsworth et al., 2022). It entailed the institutionalisation of control in state institutions using the credentials of liberation to create what academics call liberation hegemony, where the power of elections is reinforced by historical narratives, elite unity, and the resources of incumbency (Melber, 2022a). However, the survival of this domination is different in the three nations. Internal factionalism and a lack of popular trust have also slowly weakened the once solidified dominance of the ANC in South Africa, and SWAPO is currently experiencing certain pressures caused by the youth constituencies and the urbanised middle classes (Melber, 2021b). Angola is an example of the most established type of dominance, where the power of the MPLA is still tightly associated with its control over state resources and an environment that can be classified as more competitive authoritarianism (Lippolis, 2022). These independent results demonstrate that all liberation movements do not follow the same course, but their course will be created based on the institutional structure, the socio-economic situation, and the level of organizing resistance over time.

A comparative approach reveals that, in all three states, although liberation credentials provided initial grounds for unity, the sustainability of dominance has been pegged on the ability of ruling parties to respond to the changing economic and political demands. In South Africa, the challenges in governance and the disappointment of people contributed to the rise of competitive pressures, as the opposition forces took advantage of governance failures and found it hard to preserve the capacity of the ANC to sustain a cohesive organisational structure (Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes, 2023). Namibia represents a modified variant of dominant-party rule, whereby SWAPO still enjoys an image of national unity, but suffers a contested electoral basis and increasing competition with up-and-coming movements and independent politics, especially in cities (Melber, 2022b). Angola, in turn, demonstrates an example when consolidation of elites, the manipulation of the state institutions, and structural barriers to pluralism diminished the chances of successful opposition competition despite the regular participation in elections (Soares de Oliveira, 2015). These trends, when examined comparatively, indicate that liberation movements maintain power not just in historical legitimacy but also in the modern forms of elite negotiation, resource allocation, and agenda-making influence in both formal and informal political organisations.

Angola: A Blocked Path to Pluralism

Angola is the country with the most restrictive competition environment among the three countries, as it exhibits the attributes of an electoral authoritarian regime, characterised by formal democratic institutions but limited pluralism. By utilising its ability to access state resources and manipulate electoral regulations, as well as excluding opposition mobilisation, the MPLA has maintained continuous domination since its independence (International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies, 2022). According to the scholars, the Angolan political environment is characterized by a high level of elite networks, centralised governments, and a lack of institutional autonomy, which prevent the development of viable political alternatives (Soares de Oliveira, 2015). Although regular elections are held, incumbency serves as the resource that is heavily favoured in the system and, therefore, a system where the opposition parties are unable to extend their influence or reach their organisational levels, nor affect policy processes (Pearce, 2023). Economic strains, elite bargaining, and state patronage also strengthen the MPLA that is an indication of an emerging system that is inclined towards competitive authoritarianism and not towards democratic consolidation. In a comparative analysis, Angola is a good example of how liberation movements can turn into highly centralised ruling regimes with politically competitive processes but effectively inhibited.

Political Competition and Elitism in Angola

Political competition in Angola has been a significant aspect of the country's history, marked by the struggle for power between different political parties (Jonathan & Humphrey, 2021). The ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) has maintained hegemony through electoral victories, consolidating power, and limiting opposition influence (Jonathan & Humphrey, 2021). The MPLA's dominance has led to concerns about the country's political landscape becoming a de facto one-party state, with limited space for dissenting voices (Hamdun, 2022). Furthermore, the debates about democratic representation have been brought to light by the protests in Angola, where people are calling into question the legitimacy of the ruling party and pushing for more inclusive political participation (Hamdun, 2022). Despite these obstacles, Angola has concentrated on reforming its foreign policy, especially in relation to the BRICS nations, exhibiting a realistic approach to cooperative political, economic, and developmental efforts (Santos, 2022).

Emerging Trends and Patterns of Political Competition in Angola

Since the warfare ended in 2002, there have been significant changes to the Angolan political landscape (Pacatolo, 2022). Without a doubt, the most significant of these developments is the return of peace, which is necessary for any political community to grow and, in Angola's case, has sparked the country's democratic process again (Pacatolo, 2022). The nation has made strides in creating a fully democratic political system, as demonstrated by the following instances (Carboni, 2020). These include the planning of three separate election systems, the adoption of a new constitution, and

the 2020 date of the eagerly anticipated first local elections in the nation (Wanda et al., 2023). Angolans have cast ballots three times since the end of their civil war: in 2008, in 2012, and in 2017.

These elections saw the participation of several political parties, confirming the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola's (MPLA) electoral dominance (Wanda et al., 2023). According to Gastrow (2020), "the politics of Presidential succession" made the 2017 election process especially significant. President João Lourenço became the new head of state when President dos Santos, after nearly forty years in office, opted not to run for office again (Dye et al., 2020). A new constitution was also enacted in Angola during the post-war period. All public and private affairs in the Angolan polity were governed by a constitutional law that was passed in 1991 and amended in 1992 until the new constitution was approved in 2010 (Dye et al., 2020).

The agreement was provisional in nature since, at the time of its passage, it was anticipated that the legislature would write a new constitution following the 1992 national multiparty elections (Carvalho & Taylor, 2022). Nevertheless, the fact that the civil conflict resumed following the elections prevented this from occurring. As a result, the lengthy process of crafting a new constitution came to an end with the adoption of a new one in 2010 (Schubert & Schubert, 2022). The new constitution upheld elements present in earlier constitutions, even if it introduced significant improvements like the elimination of direct Presidential elections (Schubert & Schubert, 2022).

Articles 217–222 of the CRA 2010 address the institutionalisation of *autarquias locais*, or elected local government entities, which are composed of a president, an executive body with collegiate status, and an assembly with decision-making authority (Gaio, 2017). There are currently no locally elected authorities in Angola. At the local level (province, municipality, and district), the central government appoints all state officials. The first local elections in the nation's history are currently slated for 2020, following a series of postponements (Gaio, 2017).

In Angola's fourth election cycle (2022), the ruling MPLA saw a further decline in its percentage of the vote, at 51% (Rodrigues, 2022). In light of their prior election outcomes, which were 82% in 2008, 71% in 2012, and 61% in 2017, this drop is noteworthy (Rodrigues, 2022). Two unofficial parallel counts cast doubt on the National Electoral Commission's official results, which are declared to be independent. According to these alternate tallies, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the main opposition party, was ahead of the MPLA by 51% to 44.5% (Péclard, 2021). However, all opposition challenges to the results were dismissed by the judiciary, leading to the new parliament being sworn in based on the official figures. Despite the dubious official results, UNITA managed to secure a significant victory in the capital city, Luanda, where one-third of the population resides, winning by a wide margin of 63% (Péclard, 2021).

Most voters had a quick and easy time casting their ballots on election day, which was a largely calm and well-organised voting procedure nationwide (Elsharkawy, 2024). Nonetheless, a few grievances surfaced, such as accounts of voting places opening later than expected and opposition members not being allowed access to the voter records (Elsharkawy, 2024). In several voting places, law enforcement officers also positioned themselves closer than the legally required 100 meters, and at the end of the day, some polling places declined to make their results available to the public (Daniel, 2021).

More importantly, the MPLA manipulated the results of the election to its advantage by abusing its position as the incumbent, even beyond these anomalies on election day (Daniel, 2021). This includes limiting media coverage in state-affiliated publications, resulting in unequal airtime and skewed reporting, and altering the makeup of judges and the electoral commission (Ndlovu, 2020). State resources were also used for campaigning. To impede the registration and authorization of new political parties, administrative barriers were also put in place. Voter registration has gotten easier and faster, but people without the right identity documents, especially in rural regions, have had trouble registering to vote (Ndlovu, 2020). Parties opposed to the administration persisted in voicing concerns about the existence of deceased individuals who supported the government on the voter lists.

The shift from former President dos Santos to President Lourenço has greatly reduced the role of an unelected elite (i.e., the dos Santos family and its allies) in weakening the authority of elected political representatives (Blaauw & Zaire, 2023). However, despite the departure of this elite from their former unquestioned position of power, the fundamental power structures have not undergone considerable changes. In both the flawed 2017 and 2022 elections, President Lourenço emerged victorious as the leader of the MPLA's candidacies, establishing himself as a duly elected political figure with substantial administrative ability to rule (Blaauw & Zaire, 2023). Lourenço continues to be the final arbiter in all political affairs since he personally selects ministers and regional governors.

The National Assembly, on the other hand, reports directly to the executive branch (Jonathan & Humphrey, 2021). The House rules provide opposition representatives with a limited amount of time to voice their opinions, and the MPLA has little incentive to have serious conversations with the opposition beyond token gestures because of its majority. Moreover, policy innovation is restricted even inside the MPLA, as parliamentarians essentially replicate the President's directions (Santos, 2022).

Political Competition and Elitism in South Africa

Significant political trends and patterns have emerged in South Africa since independence (Pildes, 2020): The nation has moved from a state ruled by whites with a strong state-capitalist nexus to a post-colonial era characterised by radicalisation, anti-colonial sentiments, and a leftward shift in political ideology; this transition has been matched by a re-evaluation of the post-apartheid era (Pildes, 2020), which has been defined by confrontational politics and a retrospective analysis of the colonialist past (Vasilopoulou & Zur, 2024). Political unpredictability has made people more dissatisfied with society, given rise to new progressive political players, and increased calls for quick change, especially in the higher education sector (Oesch & Rennwald, 2019). With universities becoming hotbeds of ideological conflict and calls for social justice and decolonisation, these shifts have created a politically unstable environment that affects public institutions like theirs (Oesch & Rennwald, 2019).

Emerging Trends and Patterns of Political Competition in South Africa

South Africa's emerging trends point to a trend toward more political competition, which is driven by elements like federalism, local electoral competitiveness, and political advertising (Motz et al., 2022). The country's federal structures are progressively promoting positive political competition by giving opposition parties multiple platforms for political expression (Motz et al., 2022). Local electoral competitiveness is also critical to accountability and public goods provision at the local level, as competitive municipalities face greater pressure to provide services than single-party municipalities (Wheatley & Mendez, 2020). Furthermore, the surge in political advertising in South Africa has profoundly altered the political discourse and the broader culture of newspapers, highlighting the country's dynamic environment of political communication and engagement (Wheatley & Mendez, 2020).

Since South Africa's independence, the African National Congress (ANC) has maintained a strong position in the political landscape, facing challenges from numerous opposition groups (Pasini & Rebessi, 2019). Due to internal ANC fractures, leadership disputes, and ideological disagreements, new opposition groups, such as the Congress of the People (COPE), have emerged (Pasini & Rebessi, 2019). Despite its hegemonic ambitions, the ANC has demonstrated that it is willing to act like an electorally focused party in a liberal democracy, even if this means that some internal challenges from the party's rank and file members are accepted (Gadjanova, 2021).

According to academics, the primary obstacle facing opposition parties in Africa is not party system fragmentation but rather party system concentration (Gadjanova, 2021). This emphasises the necessity of electoral engineering to boost competition and maybe create a two-party system (Kenneth & Kinyua, 2020). The Western Cape province elections in South Africa have become more competitive, demonstrating how opposition forces can gain ground by taking subnational positions and establishing a track record of good government to draw in new followers (Kenneth & Kinyua, 2020).

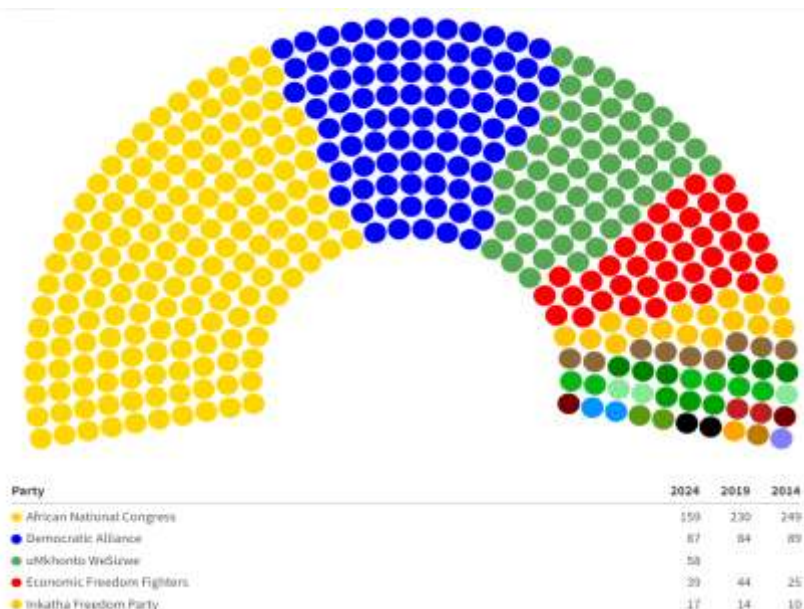


Figure 1.1 South Africa Party Performance

In the first elections in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) garnered roughly 62% of the vote, solidifying its position as the dominant political force (Kariuki et al., 2022). Over time, the ANC's share of the vote fluctuated, reaching a peak of roughly 69% in the 2004 elections but then gradually declining to just under 58% (230 seats) in the 2019 elections (figure 1.1). The decline can be attributed to rising voter discontent, corruption concerns, and the rise of powerful opposition parties (Bogaards & Elischer, 2016). The Democratic Alliance (DA), South Africa's main opposition party, has steadily grown since its founding, taking 22% of the vote in 2014 compared to roughly 16% in 2009 (Bogaards & Elischer, 2016).

On the other hand, the DA's expansion seems to have stopped, as seen by its 21% vote in the 2019 elections. Founded in 2013, the relatively new Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party has also made considerable gains, especially with younger people, receiving 6% of the vote in 2014 and rising to 11% in 2019 (Short, 2014). Another significant development in South African elections has been voter turnout. Voter turnout has steadily decreased, with only 66% of eligible voters casting ballots in the 2019 elections, compared to an astonishing 86% in the first post-apartheid elections. This pattern indicates growing voter disenchantment and apathy with the political process (Short, 2014).

Namibia: The Middle Ground

Namibia is a mirror of the modernised form of dominant-party rule, in which democratic institutions function with moderate stability but in which an asymmetrical form of electoral competition is present. The long-term political legitimacy of the SWAPO party remains based on its historical association with national liberation, and it has allowed it to maintain long-term domination despite its gradual erosion in the electoral process (Melber, 2020). Politics is more liberal than in Angola

because opposition parties are allowed to challenge elections and gain a voice in the governing processes, but structural advantages of SWAPO, such as organisational coverage, existing networks, and authorities associated with the state, still restrict alternation opportunities (Melber, 2022b). Current developments pushed by the mobilisation of youth, socio-economic frustrations, and independent campaigns show that competition in politics is gradually on the rise, especially in the urban areas where the control of SWAPO is not so sure (Shikukutu, 2022). There is no systematic institutional repression of dissent as is the case in Angola; still, the legacy and power of the ruling party influence the political landscape in such a way that restricts the expansion of the opposition parties in Namibia. Comparing the two countries in terms of their political environment, which is more fragmented in South Africa, Namibia takes an intermediate role, exhibiting both characteristics of democratic stability and the signs of limited pluralism.

Comparative Patterns of Pluralism and Constraint

The extent to which political competition is allowed or repressed is significantly different in the three cases, and it brings forth various structures of institutional openness and democratic consolidation. The Angolan system is the closest to the features of electoral authoritarianism, where the formal multiparty systems do exist, but the institutional environment does not allow meaningful rivalry due to the centralised control over media, resources, and regulatory authorities (International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies, 2022). The situation in Namibia is a hybrid one: the formal institutions of democracy are functioning correctly, but the hegemony of SWAPO is supported by its liberation legitimacy, organisational scope, and electoral benefits, which create obstacles to full political alternation despite an increase in competition pressure (Melber, 2020).

South Africa, in its turn, is indicative of a more open competition environment, as rising electoral fragmentation and coalition politics represent a gradual move out of the domineering-party rule, led by the socio-economic disgruntlement and the loss of trust in the ruling elites (Gasnolar, 2022). The comparative analysis reveals that pluralism is influenced not only by the outcomes of elections but also by how much ruling parties permit institutional room for contesting, tolerate opposition mobilisation, and rule-based governance. Theoretically, Angola is the least pluralistic, Namibia is semi-competitive, and South Africa is at the end of the competitive but constitutionally open spectrum.

A comparative approach to the analysis of these trends highlights the point that the dominance of liberation parties is not a monolithic phenomenon, but instead changes in reaction to the inner-party dynamics, outer-socio-economic pressure, and resistance capacity. In Angola, the ability of the MPLA to strengthen the ties between the elites and control patronage has kept the opposition parties divided and impaired in an administrative way (Pearce, 2023). The Namibian political landscape is witnessing a new change, with the young activism, deteriorating economic outcomes, and governance issues reestablishing the balance between the population and the ruling party (Shikukutu, 2022). South Africa is the place where a gradual erosion of the ANC dominance in elections due to increasing public contestation, active civil society politics, and growing opposition coordination has yet to turn into a full transition to alternation (Alexander, 2021).

These cross-case lessons indicate that the continuation or fading of the ruling-party dominance is not entirely explained by historical liberation credentials, but rather is conditioned by the changing political incentives, the institutional strength, and the strategic behaviour of the incumbents and the opposition actors.

Historicising Trends and Patterns of Political Competition in Namibia

The politics of Namibia after independence is to do with the development of a dominant-party structure, which is formed by the legacy of liberation politics of SWAPO, but one that has been conditioned by institutional, socio-economic, and generational forces that are exerting more pressure on the attainability of the political authority at the very core. Even though initial electoral success rooted SWAPO in place, academic literature indicates that liberation movements entrench power not only based on the historic symbolism, but also through organisational access, incumbency benefit, and coalition of elites (Melber, 2020). These attributes make Namibia stand out compared to the more limiting competitive authoritarianism of Angola and the more disaggregated competition space in South Africa (Beardsworth et al., 2022). The opposition parties that are found in Namibia, including PDM, COD, and RDP, have tried to use governance failures and social dissatisfaction over time, but due to the imbalance of resources, uneven electoral regulations, and the instrumental influence of the ruling party on the state institutions, they have not been able to disrupt the reign of SWAPO (Blaauw & Zaire, 2023). These comparative data indicate that the Namibian political arena is still more liberal than the Angolan one but much less competitive than the South African one, which is evidence of a mixed system in which democratic institutions co-exist with structural obstacles to alternation.

In addition to the official party system, the Namibian political contest has been more and more influenced by socio-economic dissatisfaction among young people and urban voters, whose discontent reverberates the situation in the rest of the region in the post-liberation states. The increase in unemployment, issues of governance, and perceived lack of political integrity have led to a change of voter preference, resulting in the development of independent candidates and civic movements that offered an alternative to the conventional party politics (Shikukutu, 2022). Research on dominant-party decay claims that these societal changes, especially among younger, urbanized, and more politically aggressive groups, can delegitimize long-established hegemonic power without the immediate opposition coherence (Melber, 2021b). Equivalent processes have transformed the politics of power in South Africa, where waning trust in the ruling party is hastening the division of electoral politics, and in Angola, where urban mobilisation is challenging MPLA control more and more despite institutional bottlenecks (Alexander, 2021). These pressures have in Namibia given rise to quantifiable but slow diminutions in the electoral margins of SWAPO, illustrating the idea that the stability of the dominant party rests on the continued existence of legitimacy and not on liberation credentials alone. The trend places Namibia in a transitional status where political pluralism is growing, but limited by the combination of incumbency benefits and unequal development

of opposition.

The institutional factors also affect the competitive environment of Namibia and support the structural advantage of the ruling party despite the change in electoral attitudes. The mixed electoral system of the country, which unites the elements of proportional representation and the elements of constituency electorate, is inclined to support bigger parties with numerous organisational followers, which strengthens the further legislative power of SWAPO (Kossler, 2020). According to the comparative theory, when the opposition parties are disunited or have no nationwide visibility, the dominant parties accumulate institutional design that enhances incumbency power (Arriola et al., 2021). The same can be seen in Namibia: although democratic procedures are rather factual, the opposition parties are financially, logistically, and strategically constrained, which prevents their competitiveness in comparison to long-established institutions and networks of SWAPO (Melber, 2022a). This contrasts with South Africa, whose institutional openness facilitated multiparty growth, and with Angola, where institutional control has greatly inhibit pluralism. The institutional form of Namibia is therefore placed between the two extremes, which encourages electoral participation but structurally unequal contestation. With the changing nature of political competition, the relationship between institutional form and socio-economic forces and changing voter alignments will either enhance the democratic pluralism in Namibia or will continue to support a moderated form of dominant-party rule.

Post-Independence Era

The political course followed by Namibia since the end of the 20th century demonstrates that the country has developed a system of dominant parties where SWAPO has transformed its legitimacy as the liberation party into electoral power, institutional power, and long-term incumbency. In 1989, the session of the elections that was conducted under the supervision of the United Nations became one of the foundational moments in the process of the democratic consolidation of Namibia, as it represented the first formal test of the political competition in the country after the liberation struggle (Melber, 2020). As the Figure above shows clearly, 57 percent of the vote was won by SWAPO, which was against 29 percent by its primary opponent, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), now PDM, and all the other parties together obtained less than 10 percent. This pattern of support indicated the degree to which the liberation discourses and the organisational solidarity influenced the initial voter turnout, which was similar in Angola, where the MPLA carried the day in the first elections after the war, and South Africa, where the ANC swept the board in the 1994 transition (Beardsworth et al., 2022). Analytically, the figure not only represents the numerical success of SWAPO but also its structural power: the supporters of the party were located in geographical dispersion, with its roots in history and political integrity, which made the party the central designer of the new political order. This depicts a typical dominant-party system, with the liberation movements joining the democratic realm with unequal points of power in comparison with the opposition actors.

The exceptionally high voter turnout, reported at almost 97 percent, also confirms the political peculiarities of the Namibian democratic establishment, as it shows that the society is greatly invested in the formation of the post-colonial future of the country (Kossler, 2020). However, although high participation usually tends to correlate with democratic vitality, comparative theory warns that high turnout in election years at the outset of a new constitution is likely an aspirational event and not necessarily a sound trend of political turnout. As the figure attached indicates, competition has been structurally unequal, in that only two parties have been gaining any significant electoral momentum, and the rest of the parties have not been able to get past marginal support. This is similar to the early post-independence politics in South Africa, where the ANC dominated over opposition parties, but unlike in Angola, where later elections established an even more centralised model of domination as a result of the MPLA dominating state resources (Lippolis, 2022). The 1989 outcomes of Namibia thus show a politically formatted situation which was technically pluralistic but substantially conditioned by unequal power relations, which would remain the most characteristic feature of party rivalry in the next decades. This advantage was institutionalised by the acquisition of 41 of 72 seats in the Constituent Assembly by SWAPO, and made it the dominating governing party, able to create constitutional, administrative, and policy paths without much opposition from a fractured opposition.

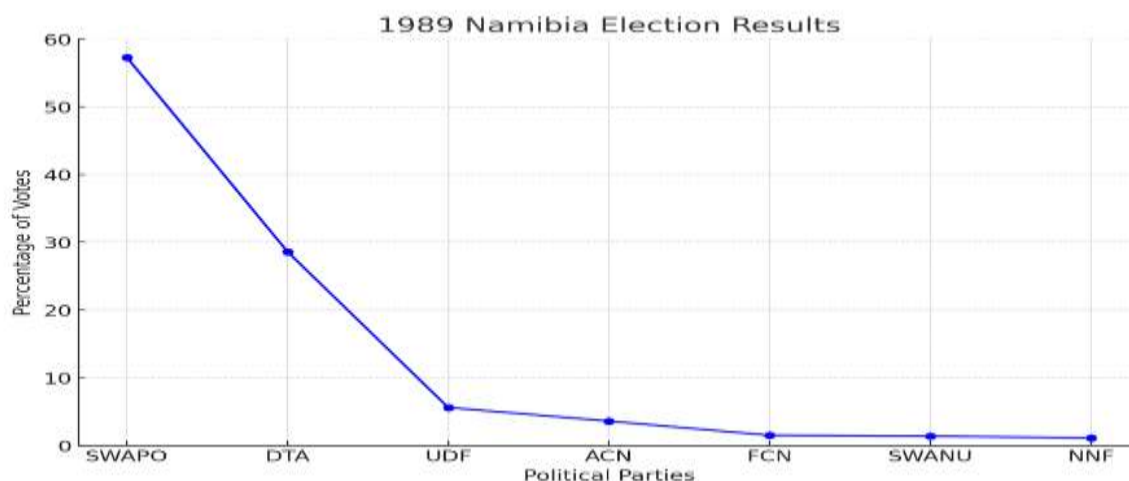


Figure 2.1: Namibia 1989 Election Results
Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

The results found in Figure 2.1 also demonstrate the organisational flaws of the opposition in Namibia, which had difficulties in formulating a consistent alternative to the authority of liberation-based SWAPO. The 29% share of the PDM(DTA) was a big minority, but not deep, ideologically focused, or nationwide enough to oppose the power of SWAPO (Blaauw & Zaire, 2023). Smaller parties, including UDF, ACN, FCN, SWANU, and NNF, got practically no support, meaning that the opposition was highly fragmented, where the electoral contests were not concentrated but spread out. Comparative scholarship states that this fragmentation restricts the chances of alternation, especially in the cases of systems where the ruling party enjoys the advantages of pre-existing organisational patterns and the symbolic capital of liberation leadership (Arriola et al., 2021). Comparing it with the virtually closed political environment in Angola and the late introduction of more competitive multiparty politics in South Africa, Namibia is in the middle-ground position, being democratically institutionalised but structurally biased towards one strong party. The outcomes of the 1989 election, therefore, highlighted the centralization of the power of SWAPO as well as the future problems of the opposition in Namibia, which forms the basis of political competition that is marked by stability, yet lacks pluralistic equilibrium.

Namibia's Early Electoral Trajectory and the Consolidation of Dominant-Party Politics.

As is seen in an election result in 1994, as shown in the attached figure, there was a notable concentration of the dominance of SWAPO in the newly formed democratic structure in Namibia. Compared to the 1989 outcome that ensured that SWAPO was the dominant political force, the 1994 election returned much stronger consolidation of political power, whereby SWAPO garnered about 74 per cent of the national vote as DTA ran away with about 20 per cent. The structural marginalisation of opposition forces was affirmed by smaller parties like UDF, MAG, and FCN gaining less than 5% between them. Such a trend is compatible with the dominant-party theory, which states that liberation movements tend to increase their electoral strength in the second electoral cycle, when the organisation capacity is more established, and the actors of opposition have difficulties mobilizing alternative political identities [14]. Compared evidence indicates that the same trends are being followed in South Africa, where ANC has increased its votes in 1999, and in Angola, where MPLA has solidified under its incumbency following the end of the major conflict (Beardsworth et al., 2022). This graph thus represents not only an arithmetic triumph but also an institutionalisation of the hegemonic status of SWAPO, an indicator of how initial electoral cycles institutionalised asymmetrical competition in a formally pluralistic system.

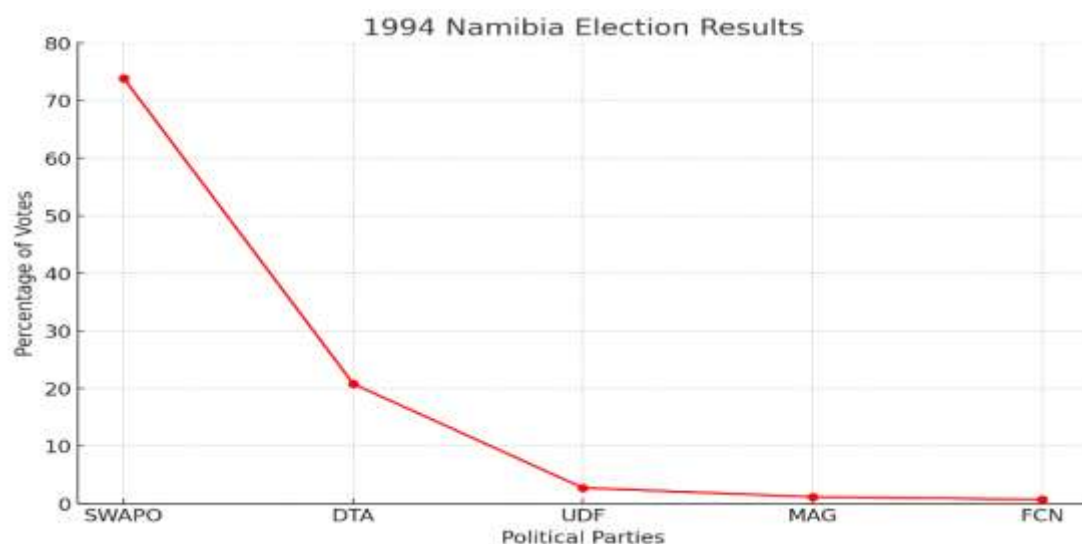


Figure 2.2 Namibia 1994 National Election Results

Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

Known critical changes in the opposition capacity can also be demonstrated by the 1994 vote distribution, which shows that the DTA lost its position as a significant factor, as a credible counterpart in the party system. Researchers observe that these weaknesses of opposition in dominant-party systems are caused by internal division as well as structural limitations of parties such as limited access to resources, weak organisational network, and symbolic power of liberation movements (Arriola et al., 2021). The numbers indicate that the UDF is slipping under 3 per cent, with MAG and FCN recording almost no support at all, in evidence of a party system that is starting to approach a dominating structure in which one party consolidates successive large majority votes without its competitors developing any significant electoral momentum. Compared to Angola, where the dominance of MPLA had been strengthened using hybrid-authoritarian tools, and South Africa, where competition within the democratic context enabled the gradual diversification of the political environment, Namibia is placed in the middle position: more competitive than Angola, though structurally less pluralistic than South Africa (Melber, 2020). The results in 1994 thus highlight how the party system in Namibia shifted to a more stable system based on the legitimacy of liberation and not the unstable nature of elections or ideological debates.

On the theoretical side, the findings of 1994 present significant implications of democratic consolidation. A strong degree of support for the ruling party is likely to increase political stability, but on the other hand, it might restrict the growth of horizontal accountability when the opposition actors are institutionally weak. Dominating-party theory often means that repeated electoral successes internalise the perception of permanent incumbency, leading to a decline in the motivation of the party of government to be responsive or internally renewed (Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes, 2023). The figure illustrates this process: the increase of SWAPO to an overwhelming majority supports the establishment of a political space where competition during elections is formal, but unequal in reality. Compared to South Africa, Namibia is at a more

advanced stage of consolidation, and external opposition has grown, increasing competitive pressures and necessitating greater hybrid-authoritarian controls on the central government, as opposed to electoral legitimacy (Lippolis, 2022). As a result, the election in Namibia in 1994 is a pivotal event in the political development of the country, which institutionalised a trend of dominance and which would continue to influence the competition of parties for a decade, but also the future viability of pluralistic democratic practice.

Consolidation of Dominant-Party Rule in Namibia: The 1999 Electoral Turning Point

Figure 2.3, which shows the outcomes of the 1999 National Assembly and Presidential elections, provides a critical analysis of the increasing institutionalisation of the hegemony of SWAPO in the Namibian post-independent politics. In the figure, SWAPO secured nearly three-quarters of the votes, by far defeating the opposition parties, including the DTA (nearly 10 percent), the newly formed Congress of Democrats (CoD) (nearly 9 percent), the UDF (less than 4 percent), and MAG (less than 1 percent). This distribution is an indication of the consolidation of a dominant-party system where there is formal competition in elections but no substance.

According to scholars, the second or third post-transition elections can tell whether a political system is stabilising into the dominant-party cell or leaning more towards greater pluralism (Beardsworth et al., 2022). The extreme vote concentration in this instance and the division of the opposition parties have indicated that there has been an overall tendency of dominance that grew based on the organisational capabilities, liberation credibility, and enhanced mobilisation of resources. This is analytically similar to Angola, where the MPLA consolidated its incumbency by centralised structures of authority, and South Africa, where the ANC, although dominant in the day, had to deal with incrementally greater levels of opposition penetration.

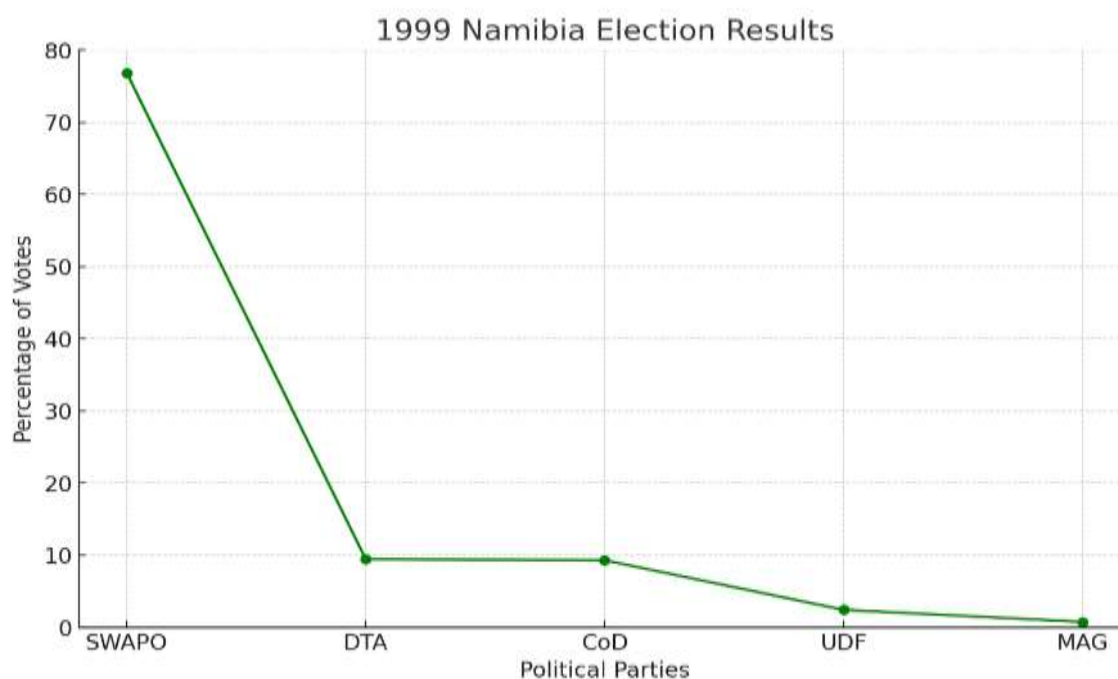


Figure 2.3 Namibia 1999 Election Results
Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

The fact that CoD comes out as a credible, yet ultimately weak entrant is another example of structural diffusion of new opposition parties in dominant party systems. The comparative research work highlights that the opposition actors in these settings tend to find it hard to transform political discontent into voting benefits because of the resource constraints and lack of visibility in the media, and the symbolic power held by the liberation movements (Arriola et al., 2021). The plummeting support of the traditional opposition, like the DTA, by the figure also shows the undermining of the already established rival parties in terms of their inability to offer any effective programmatic alternatives. According to the comparative perspective, the 1999 performance of Namibia is between the more authoritarian-oriented dominant-party trend in Angola and the more competition-oriented approach in South Africa, which again confirms the Namibian status as a formally democratic and structurally asymmetrical party system. The outcomes thus mark a crucial point in the re-establishment of the electoral dominance of SWAPO in the long term, which defines the lines of political rivalry in the further decades.

Political Trends in the 21st Century

The 2000s represented a shift in the Namibian political environment, which was signified by the gradual repositioning of the political actors and the formation of institutional practices that determined subsequent electoral practices. At this time, internal tensions rose in SWAPO, as factional alignment over generational renewal, emerged, which scholars believe is natural in dominant-party systems faced with organisational pressure to adapt (Melber, 2022). Concurrently, there were

larger social and political concerns, including the discussion of historical memory, the control of ethnic sensitivities, and the opposition to land redistribution, which were mediated with party politics as forums of political authority distribution. Analysts emphasize that these dynamics can be particularly intense in a situation with dominant-level parties, where the ruling party can govern the country and arbitrage national discourses of nationhood, shaping the political competition and the general state of democracy (Melber, 2021). In such circumstances, the opposition parties had a hard time trying to define alternative political imaginaries that could gain wide support, leading to a lack of organisational regeneration or differentiation of ideologies.

Relatively, the same tendencies played out in Angola and South Africa during the same time. The MPLA further consolidated its control over the state institutions in Angola and reorganized political space in a manner that limited the growth of opposition (Peclard, 2021), whereas the ANC's rule in South Africa generated issues such as opposition fragmentation and decreasing voter alignment beyond key urban centers (Vasilopoulou & Zur, 2024). The political processes in Namibia were thus a local trend where liberation movements were faced with a question of internal legitimacy and still had unparalleled structural benefits in the election race. These accumulations of political transformations influenced the conditions in which the national elections took place by 2004, further entrenching the preponderance-party system on a long-term basis. This, therefore, meant that Namibia entered the 2004 electoral cycle with a political arena marked by limited opposition capacity, strong incumbency advantage, and a ruling party that had to negotiate internal rivalry as well as external demands of democratic consolidation.

The 2004 Elections and the Deepening of Dominant-Party Politics

The national elections of 2004 also institutionalised the asymmetry of the political competition in Namibia, as shown in Figure 2.4, with SWAPO garnering nearly 76 percent of the vote, as in the 1999 national elections, and establishing itself as the heart of the politics in the country. Congress of Democrats (CoD) and Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) secured 7% and 5% respectively, whilst other smaller parties like the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Republican Party (RP), and the National Democratic Movement of Change (NDMC) secured fringe shares. Such an outcome structure correlates with comparative studies on dominant-party regimes, which conclude that the fragmentation of opposition and the failure to form effective alliances tend to strengthen the incumbent's benefits and inhibit the formation of strong electoral rivalry (Beardsworth et al., 2022). The weakness of the opposition in the Namibian case was further aggravated by internal disunity among CoD as well as constant organisational limitations in older parties like the DTA, leading to diffuse instead of coordinated electoral competition to SWAPO.

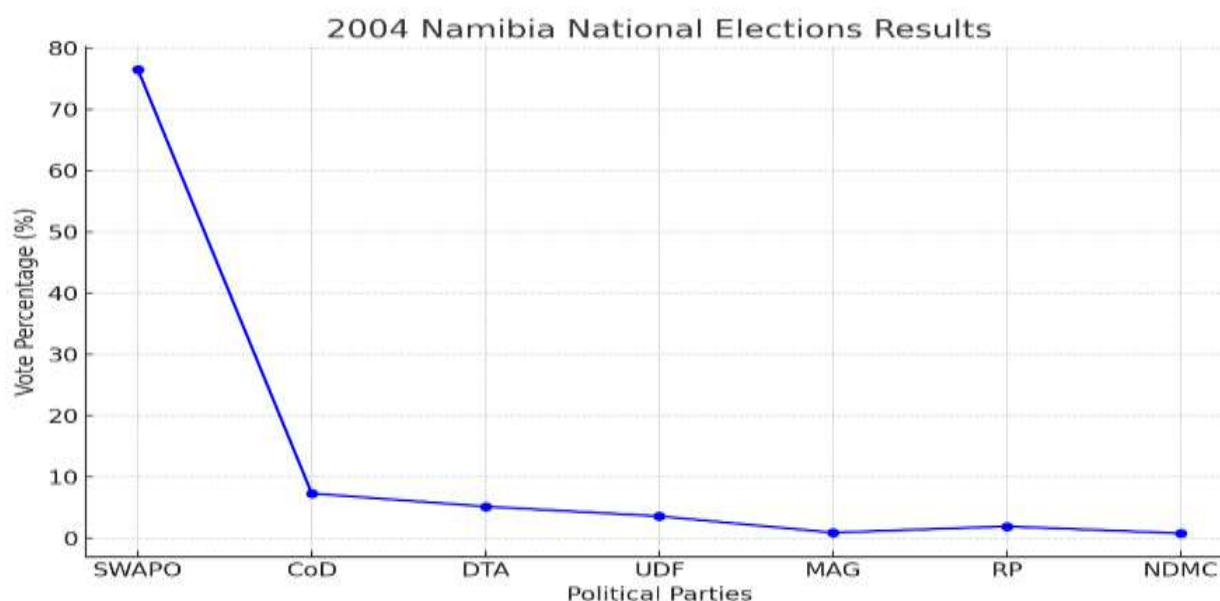


Figure 2.4 Namibia 2004 Election Results
Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

Comparatively, the Namibia result of 2004 was between that of Angola, with a highly centralised dominant-party system, and that of South Africa, whose political arena was more pluralistic yet still unequal. In Angola, institutional dominance and control of the political resources by the MPLA resulted in structurally limited competition that was similar to competitive authoritarian politics (Santos, 2022). The ANC had continued to enjoy massive national backing in South Africa but was now subjected to new pressure of opposition in urban areas that was slowly changing the nature of elections (Oyedemi, 2021). The performance of Namibia thus represents a composite of these models, a formally democratic multiparty system but with a structural asymmetry, incumbency advantage, and an established legitimacy of the liberation movement. The election was also a pointer to the continuity of political stability, but it also cast some deep, dark questions about the issue of democratic consolidation, accountability, and the long-term trend of competitive politics. The 2004 elections are therefore a turning point in which the system of dominant parties in Namibia shifted towards early consolidation to the institutionally deepening phase of political competition that has configured the lines of future political contests.

Electoral Disputes, Opposition Fragmentation and the Consolidation of Dominant-Party Rule in the 2009 Elections

The Namibian elections of 2009 were a critical point in the consolidation of the dominant party politics since the outcome depicted the increasing polarization between the SWAPO and the fractured opposition. As Figure 2.5 shows, SWAPO received an almost three-quarters majority of the national vote, with the Rally of Democracy and Progress (RDP) receiving slightly more than 10 percent, despite their initial enthusiasm following the formation by former senior SWAPO elites. Other forces such as the DTA, UDF, NUDO, RP, CoD, APP, and SWANU won between 1 and 5 percent of the vote, highlighting an opposition scene of disintegration and not coalescence. According to scholars, these trends were a response to long-standing forces in which the liberation movements use historical capital, organisational density, and state embeddedness to sustain electoral supremacy (Melber, 2020, Blaauw & Zaire, 2023). This tendency resembles the situation in Angola, where the MPLA also used its liberation credentials and access to the state resources to marginalise its opponents (Lippolis, 2022), and it is the opposite of South Africa, where the ANC, despite remaining dominant, has also lost a significant proportion of votes as citizens have become more dissatisfied (Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes, 2023). Theoretically, this electoral structure in Namibia can be characterised as a predominant-party system, which presumes that the repeated wins of one party, along with the lack of coordination by the opposition, create systematic competitive advantages in ostensibly democratic systems (Begaards & Elischer, 2016). The hegemony apparent in Figure 2.5 is thus indicative, not just of success in elections, but of an institutionalised hegemony of power at the expense of substantive competitiveness.

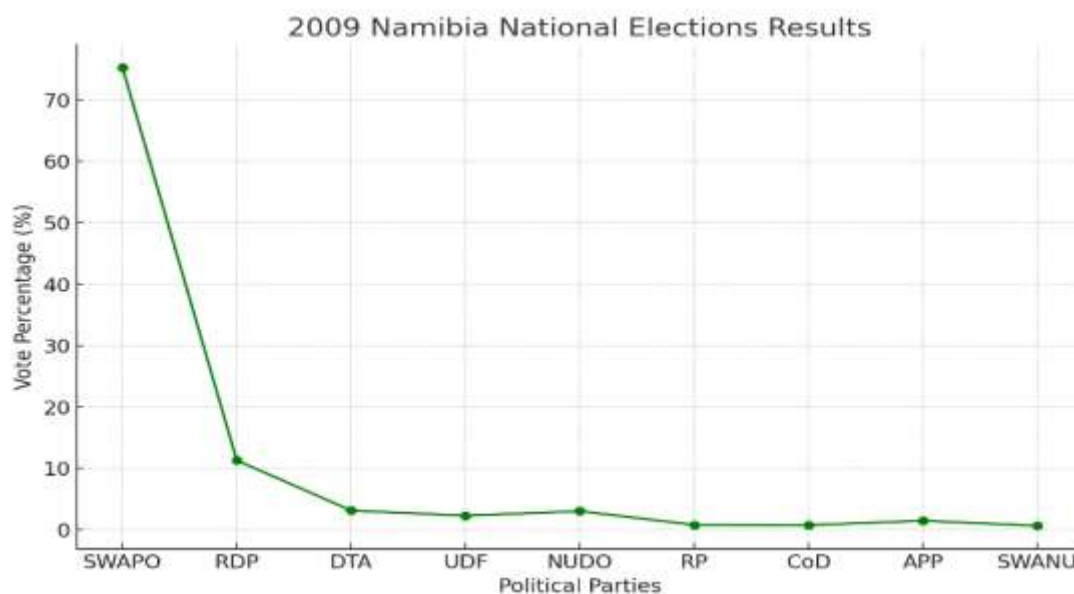


Figure 2.5 Namibia 2009 Election Results
Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

The legal wrangle occurring after the election also served to highlight structural limitations to the Namibian political landscape. Following the objections by the CoD and RP to the results, the High Court called a recount- a move that at first seemed to uphold democratic accountability but which, on recounting, produced nearly the same result as the first one, with parliamentary seat distribution remaining unchanged. Although this judicial interference revealed some degree of institutional autonomy, observers believe that this conflict revealed the lack of strategic ability on the part of the opposition, especially its failure to effectively oppose hegemonic party institutions (Beardsworth, Siachiwena & Sishuwa, 2022). The imbalance was further strengthened by the SWAPO party winning 96 seats out of 107 seats in the country during the elections of the regional councils, and the Kunene region became the only region where anti-SWAPO parties succeeded in coordinating withdrawals to get the maximum number of anti-SWAPO votes. It is based on this strategic behaviour that has been informed by the comparative politics literature that suggests that political opposition in dominant-party systems usually attempts to counteract structural disadvantages by means of tactical alliances or selective contestation (Arriola, Devaro & Meng, 2021). In comparison, Angola's opposition parties can hardly beat the co-optation of elites by the MPLA (Pacatolo, 2022), whereas smaller parties in South Africa can hardly win on the national level but more on a local basis (Habib, 2013). But in Namibia, where the SWAPO majorities continue to be overwhelming, and the opposition parties show in Figure 2.5 a fragmented share of the vote, there is reason to believe that the political environment is pluralistic, but the power balance is skewed decisively nonetheless. These dynamics imply that unless organisations are renewed, coalition-building, or elite realignment among the opposition, Namibia will carry on with its predominant-party set up to replicate itself through election cycles.

The 2014 Elections and the Entrenchment of Namibia's Predominant-Party System

The Namibian elections in 2014 also strengthened the role of the SWAPO party as one of the dominant parties, as Figure 2.6 indicates that it won over 80 percent of the national vote, the best result since independence. This unanimous backing is consistent with the findings of Melber (2020) and Blaauw and Zaire (2023), who state that liberation movements in

Southern Africa continue to have structural benefits in the form of organisational reach, access to state resources, and ingrained historical legitimacy. This can be proven by the inability of the opposition parties to grow their support patiently, as the same figure showed that all the DTA, RDP, UDF, APP, NUDO, WRP, and RP were unable to reach the 5 percent mark, and this is a severe indication of vote fragmentation. Theoretical literature on dominant-party systems implies that these asymmetries bring about persistent lop-sided challenges of competition, where contests are formally competitive and substantively unbalanced (Bogaards & Elischer, 2016). The informative comparative reading highlights the following dynamics: whereas MPLA, Angola, had kept power through elite cohesion and the allocation of resources (Lippolis, 2022), ANC, South Africa, had deteriorated incrementally in the electoral sphere because of the goal of maintaining rule and the growing public discontent (Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes, 2023). Namibia, on the other hand, showed no signs of the erosion that was evident in South Africa or the volatility that Angola experienced, which further solidified the standing of the predominant-party system in Namibia.

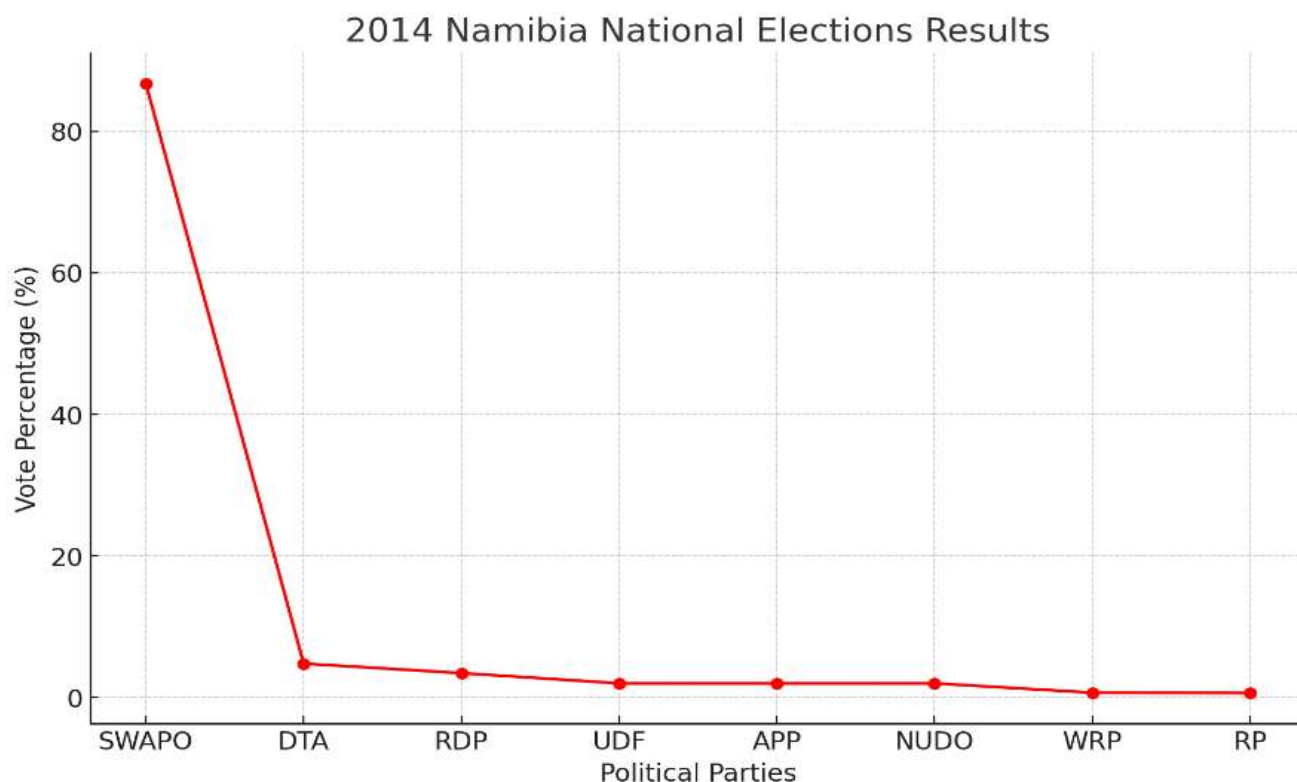


Figure 2.6 Namibia 2014 Election Results
Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

This trend was replicated by regional and local authority elections, which occurred at the same time. SWAPO remained dominant in virtually all regions except in Kunene, which had any viable opposition based on a tactical alliance between the DTA and the UDF. This reflects larger trends in Africa whereby opposition coalitions form in response to structures in competitive authoritarian or majority party situations (Arriola, Devaro & Meng, 2021). SWAPO institutional legitimacy also improved following political processes of 2010-2014, such as the promotion of better governance credentials by President Pohamba through the Mo Ibrahim Prize. Nevertheless, according to Melber (2021a), the signs of a weakening in the social coalition of the ruling party were signalled by socio-economic pressures and governance discussions, including that of the German–Namibian Joint Declaration. Comparatively, Namibia has been more stable than Angola, where the economy has been volatile, or South Africa, where the voter volatility is increasingly becoming unstable; the weakness of the opposition parties, rather than the strength of the ruling party, has contributed to Namibia's current stability.

The Reconfiguration of Political Competition in Namibia

A key turning point in the hegemonic political trend of Namibia in 2019 was the Presidential election, which indicated the greatest loss yet of the SWAPO electoral base since independence. President Hage Geingob has gained only around 56 percent of the vote, as in Figure 2.7, a significant drop from the 87 percent of the mandate received in 2014. Meanwhile, the independent candidate Panduleni Itula gained nearly 30 percent, becoming the first contender to break the SWAPO electoral dominance. This was also indicative of structural pressures on dominant-party systems more generally, as Beardsworth, Siachiwena, and Sishuwa (2022) posit, that arise when an incumbent party is unable to hold broad coalitions, and when the sections of the party are so disorganised that it undermines organisational coherence. Similar results are noted by Melber (2020), who confirms that growing discontent with the performance of governing bodies turned into volatility in the election period, and Blaauw and Zaire (2023), confirm that the deteriorated trust in political institutions changed voter affiliations in urban constituencies. Collectively, these analyses indicate that the 2019 presidential election was not only an electoral loss for SWAPO but also a restructuring of the Namibian field.

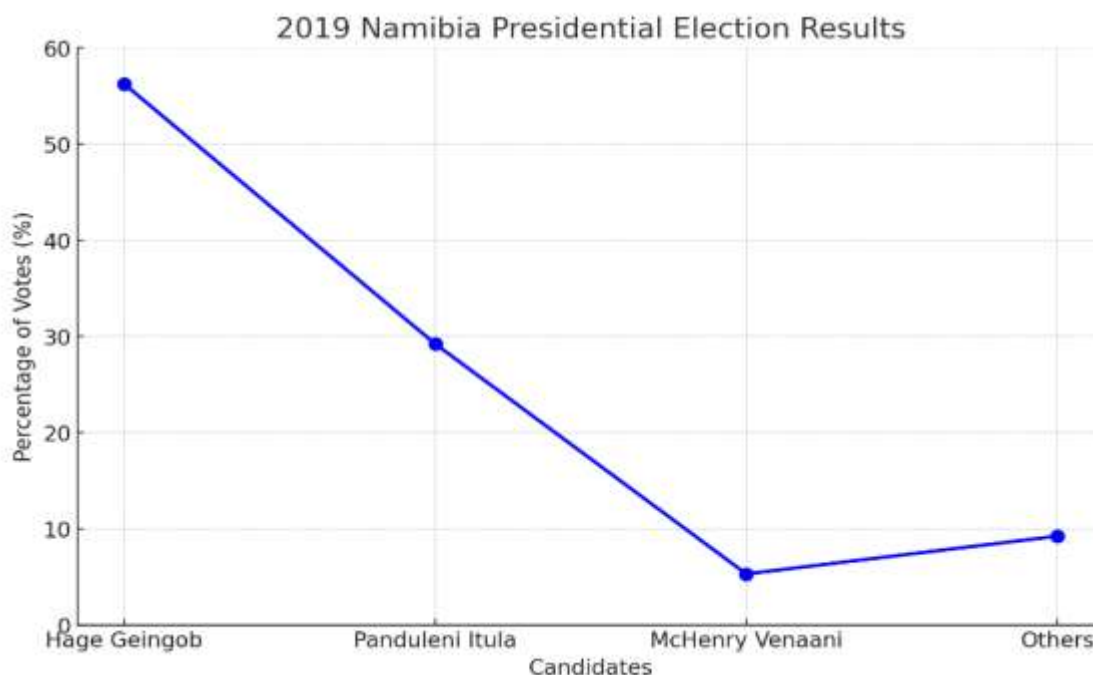


Figure 2.7 Namibia 2019 Election Results
Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

Such changes proved more noticeable in the 2020 Regional and Local Authority elections, when SWAPO lost control of major municipalities, such as Windhoek, Swakopmund, and Walvis Bay, and thus caused coalitions among the emerging opposition forces. Some scholars, including Melber (2021a), see these developments as reflecting a decline in the legitimacy of the liberation movements in the conditions of increasing youth dissatisfaction, unemployment, and growing socio-economic inequalities. Oesch and Rennwald (2019) also suggest that these dynamics are consistent with comparatively general trends in which systems of dominant parties face electoral losses to cleavages based on demographics and class when they are exacerbated by demographics and class-based cleavages. The Namibian case, therefore, represents a considerable adjustment in the perspective of political rivalry, and the timeframe between 2019 and 2023 suggests the shift towards hegemonic dominance in a competing multiparty space.

Effects of COVID-19 on Political Competition in Namibia

COVID-19 altered Namibian patterns of political competition by exposing weaknesses in the dominant-party structure and exacerbating voter discontent that had already been evident in the 2019 presidential election. With an incumbency advantage weakening and electoral volatility increasing, President Geingob dropped to 56% of the popular vote, with a hitherto fringe candidate winning close to 30 per cent of the popular vote in a major Presidential election, as shown in Figure 2.7. Scholars posit that the governance during the pandemic increased the strains on leading parties in the African continent due to the unveiling of inequalities, loss of trust, and stimulation of political accountability demands (Beardsworthy et al., 2022). Namibia was no exception, with SWAPO unable to maintain its traditional monopoly in the environment of uncertainty about the situation with public health and the economy. Similar processes can be traced through a comparative reflection to the situation of Angola, with the power of MPLA being under strain as the citizens doubted state capacity during the economic decline, and in South Africa, where the ANC was under increased scrutiny over corruption and uneven crisis management. These cross-national similarities prove that dominant-party systems are more prone to increased contestation where governance failures are combined with public crises, which supports theoretical arguments that dominant-party resilience is more contingent than being structurally determined.

The impact of the pandemic, when combined with already existing grievances over corruption, service delivery, and marginalisation of the youth, in Namibia in particular, was to expand the popularity of opposition actors and social movements. Research on the topic of democratic consolidation stresses that political rivalry is widened when citizens feel that incumbents are not responsive enough, and it results in the change of voter alignment and recalibration of the social contract (Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes, 2023). This was observed in Namibia, where civic movements such as youth-led protests and urban-based pressure groups grew more vigorous during the lockdowns when the insecurity issues, such as socio-economic issues, became more apparent. These trends reflected the South African experience, where public aggravation of the crisis increased mobilisation of opposition, and where austerity policies in Angola exposed people to greater demands of accountability. Altogether, these comparative remarks demonstrate that the pandemic acted as a stress test of the rule of dominant parties in the three countries. In the example of Namibia, the crisis hastened the removal of the dominance of SWAPO by opening up political room to other actors and weakening the traditional sources of allegiance. This is conducive to theoretical arguments that external shocks reorganize competitive locations by reshaping political legitimacy and changing voter beliefs in the competence of an incumbent.

The Current Trends and Patterns of Political Competition in Namibia

Namibian politics in 2024 underwent a major reorganisation of the dominant-party system, with the main factors influencing it being the change in leadership, economic needs, and voter behaviour. The demise of President Hage Geingob in February 2024 created an institutional gap that compelled SWAPO to reassess its succession plans and electoral communications, highlighting the constraints of the long-held benefits of incumbency. According to scholars, in times of leadership transition, the dominant-party systems tend to be more vulnerable in cases of general legitimacy pressure (Galston, 2020). The fact that Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was the first female presidential candidate in the country thus crossed over the shifting political demands of citizens and thus served as an indicator of the redrawing of the political power in the tradition of liberation movements in Namibia. In comparison with MPLA of Angola, which also experienced leadership changes within the context of diminishing electoral support, the events in Namibia show how succession politics may emerge as a decisive factor in the sustainability of the party in the western-style dominant-party system of southern Africa. They are also comparable to the South African situation, where internal leadership rivalry within the ANC has been a contributor to the poor electoral results, which is a theoretical assertion that institutional continuity may not always lead to temporary dominance in competitive electoral regimes.

Economic pressures also enhanced the changes in the competition of the political arena, though Namibia was slow to recover following the pandemic, increasing dissatisfaction among the population and opening the prospects of opposition mobilisation. The studies of democratic consolidation underline that voter realignment typically occurs in cases where dominant parties are viewed as being poorly responsive to socio-economic shocks (Freedom House, 2024b, Blaauw & Zaire, 2023, Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes, 2023). In Namibia, the long-term fiscal constraints, increasing unemployment rates, and existing inequality undermined the old social contract of SWAPO, which helped to decrease the parliamentary majority of this party in the 2024 National Assembly. They reflect much wider regional trends: in Angola, the economic stagnation and residents' disappointment with the regime have undermined the MPLA support; in South Africa, the long-term recession and economic declines have weakened ANC authority and promoted the opposition parties. In all three of the nations, economic performance has consequently turned into a major point of political contestation, supporting literature on dominant-party decline, which contends that socio-economic legitimacy is the primary focus of political hegemony. The 2024 elections in Namibia, characterized by administrative delays and increased attention to the nature of elections, are another example of how crisis circumstances put pressure on accountability and increase the competitiveness of the election in a system where ruling parties traditionally have a structural advantage. Combined, these transformations underscore a significant regional convergence, in which ruling parties of the liberation era are under mounting pressure to adjust to a highly competitive politics where economic performance and internal party unity are drivers of success (at least, in electoral terms).

Interpreting the 2024 Presidential Election Outcomes in Comparative Perspective

The current President, Her Excellency, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, with 57% of the vote, became the first female President-elect of Namibia, and SWAPO extended its 34-year dominance (Peterson & Ndeyanale, 2024). Her triumph was particularly noteworthy in a year when other liberation groups in southern Africa suffered electoral reverses. However, as public discontent with economic stagnation and inequality grew, SWAPO's majority in the National Assembly shrank from 63 to 51 seats.

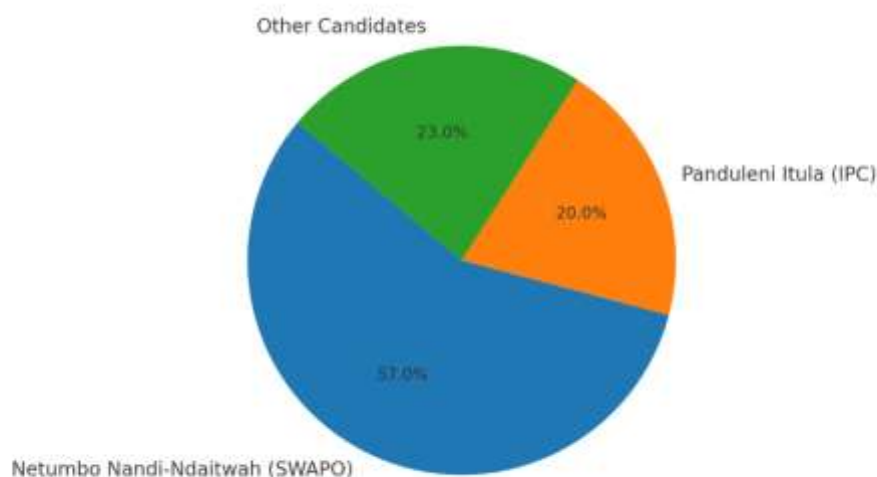


Figure 2.8 Namibia 2024 Presidential Election Results

Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia (2024).

Figure 2.8 records the 2024 Namibia presidential vote, where Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah won with 57% of the votes, about 638,560 votes, Panduleni Itula received 20.0% of the casted votes, about 284,106, and McHenry Venaani from the former Opposition Party, received 55,412, which was 5.04% of the votes casted. The remainder went to the rest of the opposition

parties. This resulted in the gradual reorganisation of the Namibian dominant-party system.

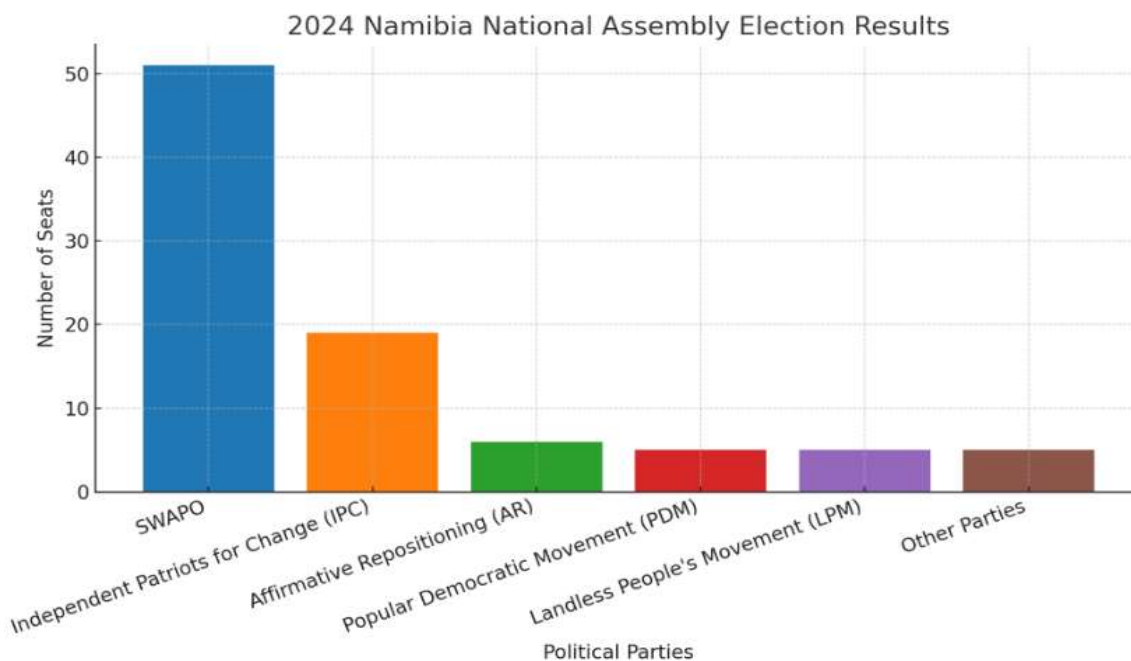


Figure 2.9 National Assembly Election Results

Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia

These findings in figure 2.9 point to a more divided political environment, where SWAPO is still in control, but it is up against a more formidable opposition in the National Assembly. Voter preferences have changed, as evidenced by the rise of parties like IPC and AR, which are probably motivated by a desire for change and economic concerns. In general, the 2024 elections were held in a tranquil setting. Namibia's peaceful pre-election and election periods were praised by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), highlighting the youth's active participation in politics. Opposition parties, however, challenged the results, claiming that voting was prolonged by a day due to technical difficulties and ballot paper shortages. They intended to file a lawsuit, claiming irregularities, to contest the election results.

Discussion/Conclusion/Closing Thoughts

Comparative analysis of Angola, Namibia, and South Africa indicates that liberation movements still abide in modern political contestations, albeit in different forms guided by institutional design, socio-economic strains, and opposition capabilities. Angola is the most restrictive setting, which is centralised control and impediments to effective contention (Lippolis, 2022). Namibia presents a case of a hybrid whereby the democratic institutions are operational, but they are entrenched in an entrenched dominant-party system on the basis of the liberation legitimacy and organisational persistence (Melber, 2021b). The most competitive environment is South Africa, where the ANC is confronted with electoral divisions, civil mobilisation, and increasing political pluralism that are indicative of the possibility of the party losing its long-term domination (Alexander, 2021). This comparative trend indicates that the ability of liberation credentials to sustain the powerful-party system is not sufficient, but should be based on its adaptability, performance in governance, unity of the elite, as well as the institutional space over which opposition organizing can take place. The knowledge of these divergent paths would be used to continue the wider discussions in the context of democratic consolidation, competitive authoritarianism, and the role of liberation movements in the changing political environment in Southern Africa. The political competition and elitism in South Africa and Angola have implications for Namibia's political stability and economic development. Namibia, despite its transition from colonial rule to a stable democracy with significant economic growth, has faced challenges related to governance and socioeconomic constraints, leading to a decline in the ruling party's credibility.

In contrast, Botswana's elite democracy, characterised by centralised power and weak executive accountability, has maintained stability through limited citizen dissatisfaction and passive democracy. Additionally, regionalism in Angola and Namibia has aimed at economic development through integration processes, although challenges in cooperation and compliance have hindered the achievement of set objectives. These factors collectively shape Namibia's political landscape, influencing its social contract, democratic contestation, and economic prospects.

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