

Namibia elections see declining support for ruling SWAPO

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The 2024 elections in mineral-rich Namibia have confirmed growing opposition to the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), in power since independence in 1990.

SWAPO president-elect Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has won the presidency with a disputed 57 percent vote share, consolidating a downward trend from 87 percent it obtained in the 2014.

Despite growing discontent with the SWAPO government over high unemployment, inequality, and widespread corruption, the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) and its candidate, Panduleni Itula—running on a pro-business platform—secured only 26 percent of the vote, a decline from the 29 percent Itula achieved in the 2019 election.

In the parliamentary elections, held on the same day, SWAPO experienced its worst results since independence. It only managed to win 51 of the 96 elected seats in the National Assembly, down 12 seats from its 63 in 2019. Nine ministers failed to make it back to parliament.

Now the official opposition, IPC won 20 seats, Affirmative Repositioning 6 seats, and the Landless People's Movement securing 5 seats. The Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), the main former right-wing opposition party, collapsed from 16 seats in the National Assembly to five.

Previously, in 2020, SWAPO lost major urban centres like Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, and Windhoek to opposition forces, highlighting a growing disconnect between the SWAPO and the urban working class.

Yesterday, as the results were announced, opposition leaders decided to boycott the announcement of the 2024 election results at the Electoral Commission of Namibia. The opposition is accusing the SWAPO government of electoral malpractices.

On Friday, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) announced that polling stations that should have closed on Wednesday would remain open until Saturday night, admitting to “logistical” failures including a shortage of ballot papers because of higher-than-expected turnout and overheating electronic tablets used to register voters. Voters had to wait for hours in long queues under the scorching sun. In some voting stations, mobile voting teams left areas with voters still in the queues.

Located on Africa's southwestern coast, Namibia was a former German colony that was handed to the South African administration by British imperialism after World War I. During this period, the African majority was subjected to South Africa's oppressive racial apartheid regime. In the 1960s SWAPO launched an armed struggle for the independence of Namibia from South Africa. After an independence settlement was arranged between the imperialist

governments and the Soviet Union, elections in 1990 brought SWAPO into government.

In its pro-capitalist and nationalist “Political Programme” of 1961, SWAPO issued three basic aims: “[to] establish a free, democratic government in SWA [South West Africa] ... to unify all the people [and to] ... reconstruct the economic, educational and social foundations which will support and maintain the real African independence which our people desire for themselves” On the economic front, it promised foreign capital to “be allowed in SWA if it will be invested in such industries as are controlled by South West Africans.”

On the critical issue of land ownership—with nearly half of Namibia's agricultural land owned by 4,000 predominantly white commercial farmers—SWAPO declared its intention to place “all existing lands with foreign title deeds and ownership under government control.”

After three decades of rule, SWAPO has demonstrated its national-capitalist road to development to be completely bankrupt. Today, Namibia is the second most unequal country in the world after South Africa. Poverty levels are high, with more than 64 percent of the population living below \$5.50 daily. Unemployment stands at 19 percent with youth unemployment exceeding 40 percent.

In rural areas it's even higher, with northern regions of Kunene, Zambezi, Ohangwena, Omusati, and Kavango West holding youth unemployment rates of over 50 percent. At the same time, nearly 40 percent of the population lives in informal settlements, with little or no access to infrastructure and basic services, including water, sanitation, and hygiene. Such is the state of deprivation that Namibian authorities announced in September they would kill hundreds of wild animals to provide food for hungry people as El Nino-induced drought wreaked havoc in rural areas.

SWAPO's promises of national cohesion have also fallen short. Minority ethnic groups like the Herero, Nama, Damara, and San face under-resourced schools, higher levels of poverty and unemployment and limited access to infrastructure, healthcare, and markets, as compared to the Ovambo ethnic group—the largest in Namibia, making up 50 percent of the population—which has dominated SWAPO's leadership.

As for the land question, statistics issued by the Namibian Statistics Agency show that white Namibians owned 70 percent of agricultural land and blacks 16 percent. Out of some 250 farms under foreign ownership, most were held by Germans.

Namibia's economy remains dominated by major international corporations, most from the imperialist countries. In diamond mining, the South African-British corporation De Beers, controlling 60 percent

of the world diamond supply—whose founder was the arch-British imperialist Cecil Rhodes—oversees much of the land and offshore mining in the country. Canadian firm Trigon Metals controls the copper industry. In the energy sector, French TotalEnergies and Anglo-Dutch Shell have made major offshore oil discoveries, with production anticipated by 2030, while US-based Chevron and ExxonMobil are actively exploring Namibia's emerging oil potential.

The upcoming \$10 billion green hydrogen project located in the Tsau Khaeb National Park will be run by the German Hyphen Hydrogen Energy. The project foresees Germany importing large quantities of hydrogen from 2028.

Namibia has also entered into a formal agreement with the European Union to collaborate on the development, extraction, processing, and supply of critical raw materials.

A significant battle to control Namibia's lithium is underway, particularly between the US and China. Namibia has the potential to become a significant producer, of strategic importance to the major imperialist powers because it is used in lithium-ion batteries installed in electric vehicles and off-grid renewable energy sources and is needed for lightweight aluminium alloys in the aerospace industry.

Chinese firm Xinfeng controls and ships thousands of tonnes of unprocessed lithium ore to China, to the dismay of the imperialist powers. Namibia's uranium sector, the world's fifth-largest producer, is dominated by Beijing's General Nuclear Power Group which operates the massive Husab Mine.

Highlighting escalating tensions in the region, outgoing US President Joe Biden made a last-minute visit to Namibia's neighbour Angola—the first African nation he has visited during his presidency. Biden underscored a key U.S.-backed initiative: a 1,344-kilometer (835-mile) railway line designed to connect the cobalt, lithium, and copper mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia's copper belt—key sources of minerals essential for electric vehicles, clean energy technologies, and microchips—to the Angolan port city of Lobito on the Atlantic Ocean. As the *Washington Post* noted, the US is increasingly focused on countering Beijing's "dominance of the global supply chain for minerals."

SWAPO's declining support mirrors anti-colonial national movements like South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and others that came to power in newly independent states. They have all exposed the organic incapacity of Africa's bourgeois nationalists to realise the aspirations of the African masses for freedom from foreign domination, democracy and social justice.

In neighbouring South Africa, the ANC, which has governed for three decades since the end of apartheid, lost its overall majority in June. In Botswana, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), in power since independence in 1966, suffered a landslide defeat. Mozambique's FRELIMO party was declared the winner of the October elections amid widespread allegations of vote rigging. The contested results have ignited nationwide protests, intersecting with massive inequality and opposition to corruption, evolving into the largest opposition movement in FRELIMO's nearly half-century rule since independence from Portugal. Government repression has resulted in the deaths of at least 60 protesters.

If SWAPO remains in power, it is above all because it faces no real opposition to its left. The pro-capitalist party led by Itula, once SWAPO's youth leader, is no alternative. Itula obtained worse results

in the president ticket than he did in 2019, running on a platform to open up the economy to international corporations still further, seeking to position Namibia among the top 25 percent globally in terms of business climate by 2030. It proposed a plan to reduce corporate tax rate from 32 percent to 22 percent. To attract small business support, it promised to make small businesses with profits below \$111,100 exempt from corporation tax, while raising the VAT registration threshold from \$55,550 USD to \$111,100 in turnover.

IPC also made appeals to German imperialism to address the land question, claiming it would engage with Berlin if elected to provide funds and post-transfer support and training for the willing seller-willing buyer land redistribution programme. It would also privatise communal land by providing property rights through the issuance of title deeds to current owners.

SWAPO has proved unable and unwilling to carry out the basic tasks of national liberation and democratic revolution. Hidipo Hamutenya, one of the main architects of SWAPO's Political Programme, explained in an interview in 1991 that its use of socialist rhetoric was partly intended as a bargaining chip with the imperialist states of the UN Security Council. "It didn't take long between [the release of SWAPO's Programme] and the resuscitation of the negotiations." Hamutenya played an instrumental role in attracting foreign investment during 1993 and 2002 while he served as Namibia's Minister of Trade.

In June 1990, the International Committee of the Fourth International warned that the "independence settlement engineered by world imperialism in collaboration with the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy and accepted by the SWAPO leadership can resolve none of the problems of the Namibian revolution nor satisfy the revolutionary aspirations of the masses."

It continued, "The SWAPO leadership has embraced a 'market economy,' making it clear it plans no major nationalizations. Control of the country's mineral wealth will remain in the hands of giant multinationals and monopolists like De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. The vast majority of the arable and ranching land will remain in the hands of wealthy Boer and German settlers. The country's independence is drastically curtailed with South Africa retaining possession of Walvis Bay, the only serviceable harbor on the Namibian coast, where the apartheid regime is maintaining and strengthening military bases."

In Namibia, as throughout the oppressed countries, only the working class, leading behind it the rest of the oppressed masses, can carry out the tasks of the national revolution by establishing its own government, going over to socialist measures and fighting for the revolution's extension internationally.



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