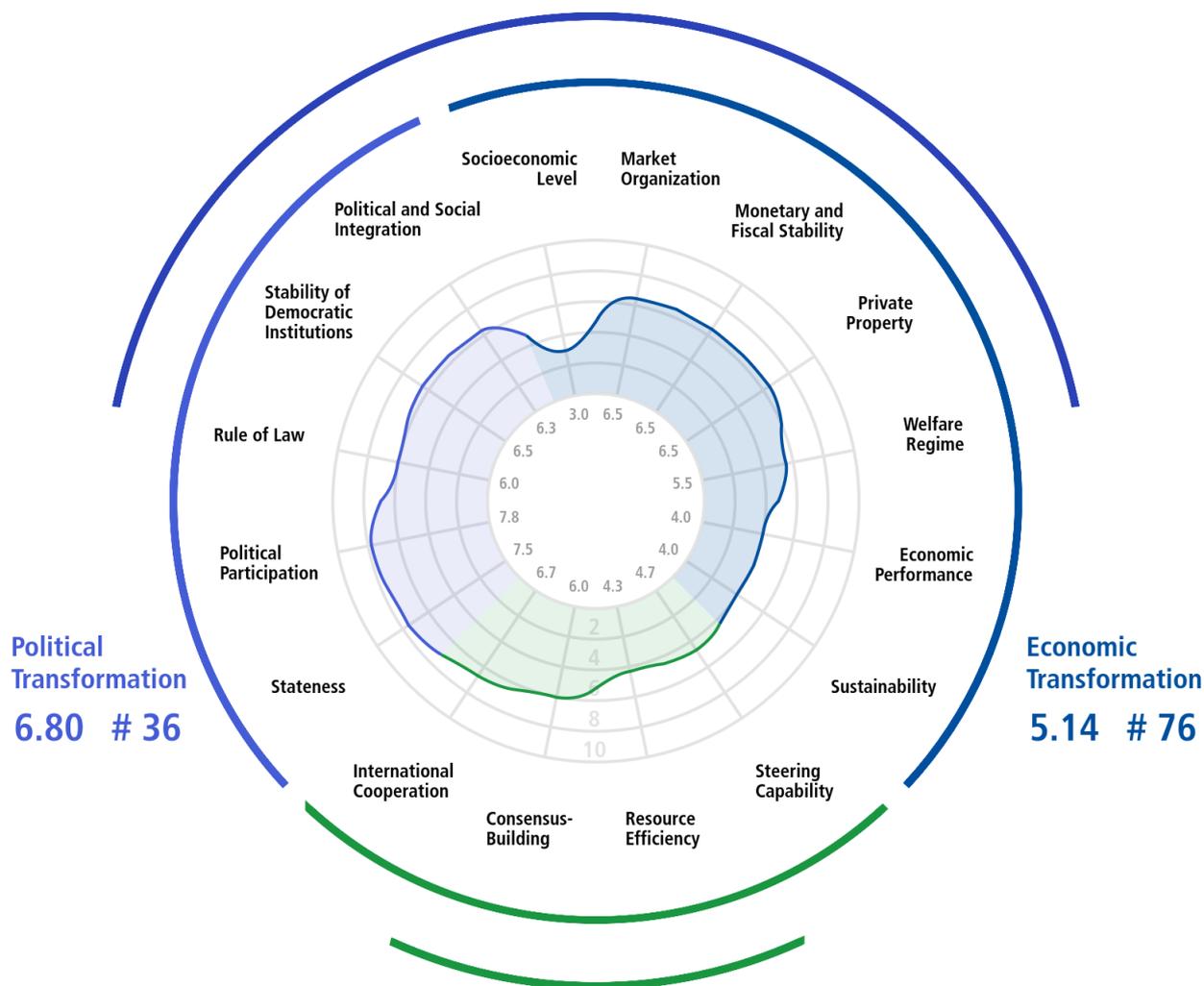


Namibia

Status Index

5.97 # 50

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
6.80 # 36

Economic Transformation
5.14 # 76

Governance Index

4.80 # 61

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026**. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

Please cite as follows: Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Namibia. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Strasse 256
33111 Gütersloh
Germany

Sabine Donner

Phone +49 5241 81 81501
sabine.donner@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Hauke Hartmann

Phone +49 5241 81 81389
hauke.hartmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Sebastian Plate

Phone +49 5241 81 81263
sebastian.plate@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Sabine Steinkamp

Phone +49 5241 81 81507
sabine.steinkamp@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Key Indicators

Population	M	3.0	HDI	0.665	GDP p.c., PPP \$	11687
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.2	HDI rank of 193	136	Gini Index	59.1
Life expectancy	years	67.4	UN Education Index	0.570	Poverty ³	% 33.3
Urban population	%	55.8	Gender inequality ²	0.448	Aid per capita \$	91.7

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

Namibia has seen notable shifts in its political landscape in recent years. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, opposition parties increased their presence in the National Assembly for the legislative term from 2020 to 2025. In the regional and local authorities elections in late 2020, they secured majorities in most municipalities and towns. However, opposition parties struggled to leverage their electoral support effectively, and policy showed no significant transformative potential.

In 2023, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) party confirmed its re-elected vice president, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (born 1952), as its candidate for the country's presidential election. Although a victory would make Nandi-Ndaitwah the country's first female president, the decision signaled continuity. As a member of the second-generation exile and liberation struggle community, she is close to Russia, China and North Korea. A practicing Anglican, she rejects abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. In February 2024, President Hage Geingob unexpectedly died in office. Following the provisions of the constitution, Vice President Nangolo Mbumba was sworn in the same day as successor, to serve until the next elected president was sworn in on March 21, 2025. Despite the shock over Geingob's demise, this was a smooth transition and caused no vacuum, disruption or unrest. Mbumba declared no ambitions beyond playing a role as interim caretaker.

SWAPO's dominance faced greater challenges from new parties in the late November 2024 National Assembly elections. Notably, most parties showed little to no fundamental differences when it came to stated economic principles and socioeconomic priorities, suggesting a general consensus on developmental paradigms. Party manifestos, which were released late, did not differ much among the various political parties.

Amid growing frustration over the SWAPO government's failure to deliver on its promises, the former liberation movement lost 12 seats, maintaining a narrow absolute majority with 53.4% (51 seats). The new Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) became the official opposition with 20.2% (20 seats), followed by Affirmative Repositioning, another newcomer, with 6.6% (seven seats).

Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was elected the next president with 58% of the vote. However, the parallel balloting had procedural flaws, including technical problems with registration identification devices and, most notably, an insufficient number of ballot papers in almost all polling stations in the country, including the capital, Windhoek. This caused long queues, with many voters having to wait for hours to cast their votes. Despite challenges on election day, voters turned out in high numbers, resulting in a turnout rate of more than 70%. The Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN), whose only primary task is to organize and execute elections every five years, has since been heavily criticized for its lack of competence and performance. The election deviated from the proclaimed format, with an ad hoc extension of two voting days ordered by President Mbumba for selected voting stations located – with one exception – in the SWAPO regional stronghold. The turbulence during the election negatively affects Namibia’s reputation as an anchor of democracy on the continent. Opposition parties challenged the results in court, asserting violations of electoral law and constitutional principles. The Supreme Court’s judgment on the issue was pending as the review period closed. But as of the time of writing, no protests had occurred, which again underscores the image of a “peaceful” country.

However, protests did spark the Marriage Act, 2024 (Act No. 14 of 2024). This prohibits the recognition of same-sex marriages, including those legally performed in other countries, and reverses the 2023 Supreme Court ruling recognizing such unions. The new law defines marriage strictly as a union between a man and a woman, excluding same-sex couples from legal recognition. It is being challenged in court.

The German-Namibian Joint Declaration on Our Colonial Past, initialed by special envoys in May 2021, was negotiated further until December 2024. Both governments then agreed on a slightly revised version to be signed by their foreign ministers, subject to parliamentary approval. But significant internal Namibian divisions remain, since major agencies representing descendants of the main victim groups were bypassed and reject the deal. As it stands, this declaration appears to hinder national reconciliation efforts in Namibia, and it remains doubtful that the agreement will still become an official document, given the change of government in Germany.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Namibia achieved independence from South Africa on March 21, 1990. In the U.N.-supervised elections for Namibia's first constituent assembly following independence, the former South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) liberation movement secured an absolute majority of the vote and has since solidified its position as the ruling party. SWAPO obtained a two-thirds majority in 1994 and more than 80% in 2014. Namibia's political system therefore did not have much of a level playing field, but largely fell into the category of a democracy dominated by a single political party from the former liberation movement.

Notwithstanding this reservation, Namibia is a multiparty democracy with a bicameral parliament that consists of the National Assembly and the National Council, the upper house representing the 14 regions. Presidential and National Assembly elections are held every five years, in parallel on the same day. The elected head of state has far-reaching executive authority with few checks and balances limiting that power. The normative governance framework is guided by a liberal constitution that safeguards fundamental civil and human rights and liberties, including the protection of private property rights. This political freedom has been coupled with a market economy that is largely built on the structural legacy of the country's settler-colonial past. While this continuity limited socioeconomic transformation and wealth redistribution, it fostered stability and trust, allowing the government to pursue reconciliation efforts aimed at addressing lingering antagonisms from the apartheid era. But it also gave rise to sentiments concerning the continued material privileges of a white minority that benefited from settler-colonial rule. Nonetheless, Namibia achieved a high degree of domestic stability and international social capital as a success story of controlled decolonization.

The first president, Sam Nujoma (president of SWAPO from its founding until 2007), served three terms in office (1990 – 2005) due to a constitutional amendment, since he was appointed by the Constituent Assembly for the first term rather than directly elected by voters. All other presidents are limited to two terms in office. Nujoma's (hand-picked) successor, Hifikepunye Pohamba (2005 – 2015), was in office during the "fat years" of good economic performance and was awarded the 2014 Ibrahim Prize for his role in forging national cohesion and reconciliation at a key stage of Namibia's consolidation of democracy and economic development. Namibia's third president, Hage Geingob, was elected in 2014 with a record 86% of the vote, assuming office in 2015. He was the first to shift the patriotic narrative ("SWAPO is the nation, and the nation is SWAPO") toward a more open metaphor of the Namibian house in which all have a place.

A recession since 2016, triggered by drought and a drop in global commodity prices, was followed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The worsening socioeconomic decline turned President Geingob's prosperity plans into empty promises. Continued gross material disparities, coupled with self-enrichment among the new elite, massive corruption, chronic poverty and rising unemployment rates among the younger generation, fueled frustration. Levels of material inequality remain among the highest in the world. SWAPO's initial recognition and the political

premium it earned for its role as an anticolonial liberation movement were eroded by increasing dissatisfaction with its limited policy achievements and its governance failures with regard to improving well-being for significant parts of the population. The visible social transformation was seen more as a pact between an old and a new elite.

The National Assembly and presidential elections in November 2019 marked a political turning point when SWAPO lost its two-thirds parliamentary majority by one seat, and President Geingob was re-elected with a record-low vote share of 56.3%. The trend continued in the regional and local authorities elections of November 2020, in which the opposition made significant gains. SWAPO lost its majority in several regions and numerous towns, including the capital, Windhoek, and other major municipalities. However, opposition parties struggled to make a meaningful impact because of internal conflicts and a failure to deliver on their own promises. After 35 years of independence, what remains is a former liberation movement as a governing party in decline.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

The entire territory is under state control. In a small part of the northeastern Zambezi region (the former Caprivi), members of a local ethnic community support greater autonomy. However, they pose no meaningful threat to state control and are not promoting armed insurrection. The party they founded is committed to nonviolent means of promoting greater autonomy. Yet it is the only party prohibited, since an armed separatist attack in August 1999 killed several insurgents, civilians and police.

Citizenship principles and the notion of a nation-state are widely recognized and accepted as legitimate. However, acquiring formal citizenship status requires proper registration at birth and access to authorities that issue identity documents confirming citizenship status. This is difficult in some remote rural regions in which certain communities (primarily Bushmen in the eastern regions but also Ovahimba in the northwestern region) have little to no means of transportation, and no awareness of their entitlements as citizens. This also limits the internalization of the concept of a nation-state and identification with it.

On another level, the government's claim to be democratically elected and therefore to represent all Namibians is contested in the case of the German-Namibian negotiations over a Joint Declaration recognizing the genocide committed in the German colony of Southwest Africa against the local indigenous communities of the Ovaherero, Nama and Damara. These communities do not feel adequately represented and have questioned the government's capability to act for them in this controversy, thereby indirectly also at least partially weakening the notion of the nation-state. Even 35 years after independence and post-apartheid, segregation and tribalism still exist in Namibia to a large extent, undermining the state identity manifested in the "One Namibia, One House" policy.

Hence, acceptance of the notion of a nation-state is strong but not total.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

10



1

State identity

8



1

Namibia is a secular state that guarantees full religious freedom as a constitutional principle. However, society and politics are to a large extent dominated and influenced by Christian doctrine – predominantly the Lutheran denomination, with smaller Catholic and Anglican churches also influential, and a growing degree of Pentecostalism.

In recent years, debates on reproductive rights (in particular, opposition to liberalizing the strict prohibition on abortion) and the recognition of LGBTQ+ rights have demonstrated the strong influence of Christian values on policy. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, elected in late November 2024 as the first female president of Namibia, is a practicing Anglican with a strong faith. She has expressed opposition to reproductive rights (abortion) and same-sex relations.

In response to the Supreme Court’s ruling recognizing locally resident foreign spouses in two same-sex married couples that included a Namibian partner (married abroad), the Namibian parliament passed a bill to enact a law that would prevent such marriage equality. The Bible was often used as a reference in these debates, including by policymakers, and churches played a major role in the campaign against LGBTQ+ rights and for the strict prohibition on abortion.

The marriage-equality bill, which drew the support of nearly all members and parties in parliament, had not been signed into law by the president as of the end of the review period. However, the influence of religious dogma has become more visible. It has also manifested in a reform of the definition of marriage that explicitly excludes same-sex partners. In conclusion, though, Namibia adheres to nondiscrimination as stipulated in Article 10 of the Namibian constitution. Regarding moral beliefs and values, Namibia remains strictly conservative in openly tolerating various definitions of family and of a couple in society.

The remote rural parts of the territory remain underserved and neglected in the provision of public goods and services. Access to clean water and electricity is limited and often highly ineffective in these areas, if such services are available at all. According to the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (2022 data), 88% of the population had access to basic drinking water services and 56.2% had access to electricity. About 35.8% had access to basic sanitation. State-owned service providers Namwater and Nampower have also introduced steep price increases, which make it difficult for urban residents to afford these services.

Many communities depend on bulk supply through local authorities, which occasionally do not pay their bills. They are then punished by supply cuts, which affects all residents regardless of whether they have paid or are in arrears. This also affects hospitals, schools, hostels and other infrastructure for which maintaining proper, uninterrupted service is critical. Facilities at schools and hostels in rural areas are in poor condition. On top of that, many families cannot afford books or school uniforms. This puts further upward pressure on the high number of school dropouts.

No interference of religious dogmas

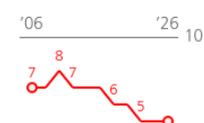
7



1

Basic administration

5



1

Some 40% to 50% of the population is estimated to live (as shack dwellers) in informal settlements that often lack basic infrastructure or depend on a central water supply, with no access to a power supply and only limited sanitation. This poses a risk especially to women of all ages who must leave their homes to use facilities or to relieve themselves in the bush. About half the population has no access to proper sanitation facilities.

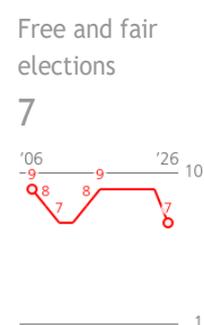
There are no visible special measures by the government or the state administration to significantly reduce hurdles or enhance access to adequate infrastructure and public services. Climate change is exacerbating constraints on water supply.

2 | Political Participation

Namibia is a multiparty liberal democracy. National Assembly and presidential elections are held every five years. Parties can register without interference if they follow the formal requirements. Only one party has been denied recognition for supporting greater autonomy for a region (the former Caprivi) and for being associated with separatists who initiated an armed insurrection in 1999. Presidential elections have always had several registered candidates. Parties and candidates have no restrictions on campaigning, and no serious violence or other forms of limitation have been recorded. However, during the last election, all independent candidates were rejected by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) for failing to comply with financial and procedural regulations. Media outlets can report freely, and parties and presidential candidates have access to the media. The Media Ombudsman conducted a survey prior to election day that monitored the fairness of campaign reporting in the print media.

Despite SWAPO's dominance as the governing party since independence, along with its resulting access to state resources and high levels of party financing through the state (which is based on the number of seats in parliament), elections have usually been considered relatively free and fair. Opposition parties submitted objections to results in court in 2014 and 2019. The courts ruled that these complaints were partially justified due to procedural shortcomings by the Electoral Commission. However, the results were not deemed manipulated to a degree that would render the outcome null and void. International election observers also considered the elections to be credible, free and fair.

However, as a state institution, the Electoral Commission has been criticized for shortcomings for some time. After a consultation process, its members are appointed by the president – as head of state – from a number of shortlisted and recommended candidates. In past elections, it has been criticized for a lack of institutional capacity, performance failures and organizational flaws in the registration of voters and the vote-casting process. However, election results have never previously been considered to be seriously or decisively influenced by these shortcomings.



This changed drastically with the National Assembly and presidential elections at the end of November 2024. The first major controversy was the last-minute awarding of the tender to print the ballot papers to a South Africa-based company that had been involved in electoral fraud in Zimbabwe. This created suspicions that there would be undue influence by that country's governing Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party in support of SWAPO. Despite a significant decline in its vote share from 65.3% to 53.4%, SWAPO secured another, albeit much reduced, absolute parliamentary majority, holding 51 (previously 63) of 96 seats. But new opposition parties, in particular the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC), made significant inroads. In the parallel presidential elections, SWAPO candidate Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was elected in the first round with 58% of the vote.

However, procedural irregularities bordering on the violation of electoral law and constitutional principles cast doubt on the legitimacy of the election results. This led the largest opposition parties to challenge the elections in the Supreme Court. The main objections concern a two-day extension of the days on which voting was allowed, decided after consultations between the president and the Electoral Commission, without first declaring the additional days to be public holidays. Under both electoral law and constitutionally enshrined presidential powers, the legitimacy of this action was questionable. Making matters worse was the fact that, with one exception, polling stations were reopened only in areas in which SWAPO is the dominant party.

Irregularities fueled suspicion of voter suppression, disenfranchisement and ballot stuffing on a scale that might have significantly affected the results. As the review period closed, the legal case on the issue remained pending, and was expected to be heard in February. The accusations are more serious than ever before, and for the first time there is widespread frustration among the electorate. While no judgment had yet been rendered as of the time of writing, the situation calls Namibia's previously positive track record with regard to democratic elections into question. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that despite logistical shortcomings – including a lack of ballot papers – and technical issues with registration devices, which caused long queues nationwide and hours of waiting, the voter turnout rate was remarkably high at more than 70%.

The sole veto power in Namibia lies with the president, the democratically elected head of state. This office holds extensive executive powers, which have been augmented through constitutional amendments, including the authority to veto specific decisions. For example, the head of state appoints numerous officials and members of key bodies, including the members of the Electoral Commission, the ombudsman and the director of the Anti-Corruption Commission, which is the state's anti-corruption authority. These executive powers are primarily exercised to make significant institutional appointments. The president signs bills adopted by parliament into law, but can also refuse to do so. As of the time of writing, parliament's bill

Effective power to govern

9



aimed at bypassing the Supreme Court's ruling granting marriage equality in some cases had not been signed since passage in mid-2023. This delay was based on further deliberations as to whether the bill complied with constitutional principles and did not generally impede democratic decision-making and its outcomes in Namibia. The separation of powers among the executive, judiciary and legislature is well established in Namibia, but there are loopholes and overlaps that reduce democratic power in political decision-making.

Namibia's constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties are largely respected by the authorities. Political freedoms, the freedom of speech and civil society advocacy face few barriers. Few limitations are imposed on these freedoms. There was one instance in 2006 when a political party advocating greater autonomy for the Zambezi region (previously Caprivi) was declared illegal. The party, while associated with the secessionist movement (although distancing itself from physical violence), was found to violate the Namibian constitution, which upholds territorial integrity. Since then, there have been occasional prohibitions on gatherings of this party in the region.

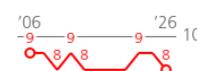
In general, civil and political liberties, including the right to protest, are widely respected in Namibia. This has benefited the role of civil society organizations in public. LGBTQ+ activists can organize public gay-pride parades without interference, and drag shows are held in public venues, even though marriage equality and other LGBTQ+ rights have not yet been incorporated into the law. However, the recent homophobic outburst triggered by the Supreme Court ruling on the equal treatment of spouses in same-sex marital relations has marked a setback to the previously more tolerant atmosphere.

On very rare occasions, there have been restrictions on or denials of permission for demonstrations, typically to avoid negative publicity when demonstrations are perceived as interfering with international events. Infrequently, police have used tear gas and rubber bullets – actions typically criticized by the public – although officers are rarely held accountable. Given the slight increase in frequency of these occasional incidents of the police's use of force, it will be important to monitor closely whether this represents an indirect method of discouraging public forms of protest. The increase in homophobic rhetoric, including among political officeholders, has been a growing infringement on previously tolerated ways of life.

A vibrant community of civil society organizations operates freely in Namibia. They often address issues in cases in which the government fails to provide services. Unfortunately, these civic organizations depend heavily on external donors. They as yet have little political influence due to a lack of capacity and resources, as well as insufficient capability to build the alliances needed to address issues at higher political levels. Work in isolation remains common, even though the challenges such groups encounter in communities are recurring.

Association /
assembly rights

8



1

A Freedom of Information Act was officially announced at the end of December 2022. This was widely welcomed by the media and various civil organizations. However, a previously adopted Whistleblower Act contained troubling ambiguities that were widely questioned and criticized. This highlights contradictions within official government policy. While the government adheres to constitutional principles and refrains from direct censorship, it maintains an ambiguous and ambivalent relationship with critical media outlets, opinion leaders and analysts.

The media in Namibia actively engage in investigative journalism and expose scandals. Reporters Without Borders consistently ranks Namibia as one of the top two African countries in its measure of media freedom. In 2024, however, the country saw a marked decline in its global ranking on the World Press Freedom Index, from 22nd place to 34th place. Many high-ranking SWAPO officials, as well as cabinet members and other officeholders, frequently avoid engaging with the media. In December 2023, the editor of the state-owned New Era daily newspaper was suspended for making critical comments on appointments to the judiciary. Although he was reinstated after several weeks, he was ultimately dismissed. This was the state's first direct intervention in media freedom, and signaled a change in the atmosphere. During the election campaign, the media were frequently attacked for being biased in favor of the opposition – an accusation not confirmed by media analyses. In December 2024, a senior journalist at the Namibian Broadcasting Company was suspended for remarks about the president-elect in an interview with a South African radio station. This underscored the increased level of monitoring and censorship of media practitioners.

Because many media outlets face a relatively fragile economic situation, there is occasional self-censorship, although media organizations remain committed overall to their watchdog function, which helps promote good governance.

International news is under-represented in Namibia. Due to economic restrictions and the small size of local media houses, they maintain few of their own international journalists outside the country. As a result, they rely on reports provided by international news agencies. There is also a lack of investigation or monitoring of “fake news” and manipulative influence on the media from outside, making Namibia more subject to this kind of threat.

Regarding the quality of journalism, there is often a failure to comply with ethical standards in reporting, particularly in criminal incidents, in which victims' photos and stories – even when minors are affected – are shared openly in public.

After several years of waiting, a trade union for journalists was officially registered at the end of 2024.

Freedom of
expression

7



1

3 | Rule of Law

A clear separation of powers is institutionalized, but executive presidential power and authority, as vested in the constitution, are far-reaching and largely uncontrolled. The National Assembly has several parliamentary committees. Because ministers and deputy ministers are also parliamentarians, these committees do not function effectively or efficiently, and make hardly any difference. A service commission bill, which remained a work in progress as of the close of the review period, would give parliament more independence in recruiting clerks and in drafting its own budget. The fact that the former liberation movement, which has served as the governing party since independence, holds an absolute majority, does not make oversight functions any easier. With the outcome of the last election, it is evident that the SWAPO party can no longer depend on an absolute majority. The National Council, as the second chamber, mainly passively reviews and rubber-stamps bills drafted in the National Assembly, and changes bills or rejects them during the process only on rare occasions.

The state institutions – the Office of the Ombudsman, the Auditor-General and the Anti-Corruption Commission – are understaffed and underfunded, and have very limited impact. Their budgets are determined by the state house. The Ombudsman and the Auditor-General have no direct policy-modifying power, and their recommendations are often ignored. Citizens can submit complaints about injustice or unfair treatment to the Office of the Ombudsman. However, this office has no power to interfere in legal processes, and can only offer remarks and advice. The Anti-Corruption Commission is primarily occupied with minor cases, and its prosecution in the one big case related to the release of the “Fishrot Files”, which uncovered extensive political and corporate collusion and corruption, has 10 different defendants facing charges, but experiences significant delays. All this contributes to an institutionalized system that tends to be rather ineffective. All this contributes to an institutionalized system that tends to be rather ineffective.

The Namibian judiciary is committed to the rule of law. Judgments in the Supreme Court and the High Court are based on the constitutional and legislative framework and its interpretation, even when this sometimes conflicts with government policies or prompts questions about laws that do not fully respect constitutional principles. Political favoritism is not apparent.

However, there are bottlenecks and long delays in court hearings. At times, delays in responses by parties involved in cases contribute to the backlog. Regional and local magistrate courts struggle with a lack of funds and staff. Cases of preferential treatment and corruption have been disclosed. To some extent, this has undermined public trust in the judiciary. Access to justice is still an issue and an unaffordable process for many people in Namibia.

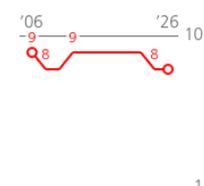
Separation of powers

6



Independent judiciary

8



Appointments rarely provoke suspicion of political preferences. However, the appointment of a Zimbabwean judge affiliated with the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) political party caused public irritation, and the editor of the state-owned daily newspaper was suspended for commenting critically on the risk of political interference and agenda-setting in the judiciary. The process of appointing the attorney general is generally perceived as a political decision.

Traditional communal authorities and customary law continue to play a significant role in some of the northern regions.

Namibian policy has shown a large gap between a rhetorical commitment to fighting corruption and visible actions in this area. The largest known case so far – addressing the “Fishrot” scandal – was an exception in that leading figures involved (ministers and high-ranking officials in state institutions) have been imprisoned and face a long-delayed trial. However, suspicions remain that SWAPO, as the governing party, benefited from the bribe money, for example to finance its campaigns.

A number of candidates on party lists for elections have been accused of corrupt practices or abuse of office, or have even been convicted of fraud or other crimes. Public opinion is highly negative regarding the lackluster performance of the Anti-Corruption Commission, and many doubt the seriousness of the expressed political will to fight corruption.

Fundamental civil rights are an integral, codified part of the constitution. They are widely respected by the government and policymakers, and are rarely violated by agencies tasked with maintaining law and order. But there has been no shift in the definition of civil rights and individual freedoms to align with general trends toward an expansion of liberties. Rather, the opposite tendency has emerged: Homophobia has increased in response to a Supreme Court ruling that provides foreign spouses of same-sex couples who married abroad but reside in Namibia with the same rights and freedoms as other foreign spouses. In response, not only was a bill seeking to undo the ruling passed in parliament, but a new marriage act was adopted that explicitly limits marriage rights to partners of the opposite sex. The Marriage Act, 2024 (Act No. 14 of 2024) officially prohibits the recognition of same-sex marriages, including those legally performed in other countries. In light of the Supreme Court ruling, this borders on contempt of court and is a setback.

In considering the issue of human rights, the emergence of human trafficking in Namibia and the increasing number of incidents of gender-based violence (GBV), primarily against women and children, cannot be ignored. Alcohol abuse is another contributing factor to violence. Much has been done to address the matter, and some improvements have been implemented in legal procedures and court facilities. The court environment has become more conducive to underage victims, and there are now GBV units at police stations. However, despite awareness campaigns on the issue of GBV, the number of incidents remains high. Another issue that must be highlighted with regard to human rights is that Namibia has one of the world’s highest suicide rates, particularly among youth.

Prosecution of office abuse

4



Civil rights

6



4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

The continued dominance of the SWAPO governing party in both the National Assembly and the National Council has somewhat limited democratic dynamics in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. While legislative decisions generally follow proper procedures, they reflect SWAPO’s party-political perspective. Dissent does not have a significant impact. Another aspect is the low level of performance by many members of parliament, who contribute little to debates or to legislative work. In addition, due to the frequent absence of lawmakers in parliament, it is often impossible to establish a quorum to pass legislation, and delays occur. Hence, parliamentary outcomes have often been criticized.

Following the 2020 local authority elections, SWAPO’s dominance in many towns and municipalities eroded as opposition party alliances gained support. However, these often ended in factional infighting and made administration even more cumbersome, if not dysfunctional. The capital’s municipality was marred by periods without an executive, and many local authorities failed to deliver the services that could have been expected. This malfunction of alliances has benefited the ruling party and calls the opposition’s capacity into question.

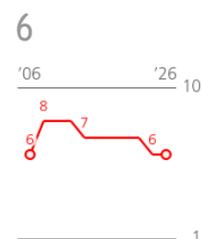
Democratic institutions are widely accepted as legitimate, but citizens increasingly question their legitimacy because of the state’s failure to deliver benefits. They observe that party-political agendas take priority. Afrobarometer surveys have shown a decline in trust in democratic institutions among respondents, even though democracy itself is still considered the preferred political system.

With the contested results of the National Assembly and presidential elections in late November 2024, public dissatisfaction with democratic processes has increased, and the election results were contested in court. While that case was pending as of the close of the review period, frustration among parts of the electorate shows distrust in electoral processes, and the legitimacy of democratic institutions might be tested more seriously than in the past.

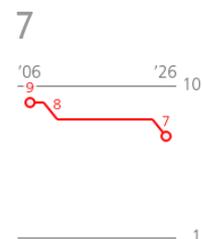
5 | Political and Social Integration

Multiparty democracy in the country is gaining strength. The political hegemony of the former liberation movement has steadily declined, reaching an all-time low since independence in the National Assembly elections of November 2024. While the results of that election were being challenged in court by opposition parties as the review period closed, they testify to an expanding diversity of parties and policy options deemed plausible by the electorate. Opposition parties have not yet been able to build a functional alliance based on mutual values and political goals, however. Most of the more than 20 registered political parties (no matter how small they are)

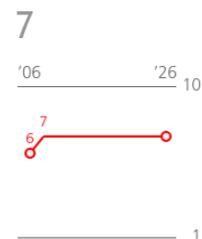
Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



Party system



nominated their own presidential candidate regardless of their chances of competing. This behavior not only wastes resources but, more importantly, splits the vote given the overall marginal support for most opposition candidates. Reaching agreement on one or two opposition candidates as part of a mature oppositional alliance has not been possible so far (despite a few efforts to seek such consensus). Political manifestos were released very late, and parties often copy and paste from one another. This does not help voters make an informed decision, especially because the manifestos are written only in English, which the majority of voters are not able to comprehend. Political party affiliation is still driven more by tribal ties than by ideas and programs. Despite concerns over a flawed electoral process, political stability remains strong and disputes remain nonviolent. A regional-ethnic component continues to play a role among some voters.

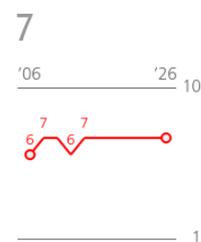
There is a network of professional interest groups (business and trade unions) and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The business community, especially the still-influential white minority and the emerging Black business elite benefiting from Black empowerment and affirmative action, wields significant influence within the political system. However, small enterprises, those active in the informal sector and rural people in communal farming areas, despite making up much of the population, remain on the margins of political influence. Business associations, such as those representing the tourism sector and commercial farmers, operate to some extent as political lobbying groups, achieving varying levels of success and appeal.

Overall, social movements and related agencies have little impact on policy formulation and agenda-setting. Established commercial interests are more important. In particular, trade unions wield considerable influence in the country. In some cases, protests by municipal workers and commercial employees, including at the Shoprite chain, have occurred.

The relative decline of the former liberation movement as the dominant party has opened new space for competing party-political activities, as illustrated by the new dynamics unfolding during the election campaign in the second half of 2024 and in its results at the voting stations. New parties rooted in social movement activism – mainly the Affirmative Repositioning (AR), and to a lesser extent the Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) – have entered institutionalized policymaking. Generally, NGOs and civil society organizations have little influence on policy, with Christian churches and trade unions having some limited impact.

Commercial and business interests remain absent from political campaigns but play a significant role as donors to some parties, especially the governing party.

Interest groups



In the 10th Afrobarometer survey, conducted in 2024, 74% of respondents in Namibia said they considered elections to be the best political opportunity. A total of 87% said they felt free to vote for a party of their choice, and 90% felt free in casting their vote. Notably, the share of respondents expressing trust and confidence in the Electoral Commission declined by 29% during the last decade. Irregularities in the November 2024 elections further fueled widespread criticism and demands for a fundamental institutional overhaul.

Despite the fact that opposition parties have gained ground and made inroads – or maybe because of this – electoral reform has emerged as a popular demand. Influential factors in voting behavior remain regional-ethnic agencies and traditional leaders in some parts of the country, while urban centers are becoming increasingly diverse with regard to residents' political preferences.

While occasional hate speech occurs, political (and cultural) differences are addressed through nonviolent means and do not erode social stability. Despite the claims in court seeking to overturn the November 2024 elections as being irregular, confidence in democratic processes is strong, as confirmed by the increasing diversity of election results. This was evidenced in 2024 by a voter turnout rate of more than 70%.

As the initial collective pride and enthusiasm over having achieved national sovereignty after a century of foreign rule have faded, poor governance under the former liberation movement has increased public disappointment and frustration. Levels of confidence in the state and public administration are low, and have declined further in recent Afrobarometer surveys. Interethnic prejudices and regional particularism have to some extent replaced the initial slogan “Namibian and proud of it.”

Since 2016, socioeconomic decline – with a slow, gradual recovery – has affected significant parts of the population, not least better-educated younger people.

The need among a growing number of people to engage in daily survival strategies have not strengthened social bonds or solidarity. The prevalence of daily violence and signs of social anomie are striking. These include high rates of gender-based violence (GBV), rape (including of toddlers and elderly women), other forms of sexual and domestic abuse, a significant number of suicides (including children), crimes (including killings over minor disputes and particularly involving female partners), and incidents of baby dumping. Despite occasional displays of human compassion and efforts by the state to assist the most vulnerable (such as drought relief and limited social welfare), those in need remain largely left to themselves. Elites and the privileged demonstrate a sense of entitlement; there is no social contract that would emphasize the subsidiary principle. To sum up, there has been a further erosion of solidarity in practice in Namibia.

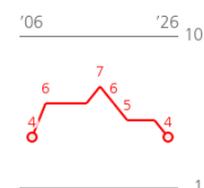
Approval of democracy

7



Social capital

4



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

After a sustained economic decline since 2015, there has been a gradual recovery through economic growth, despite conditions of severe drought. Because of population growth, per capita income has not yet returned to its 2015 level. Statistically, Namibia is a higher-middle-income country and – together with South Africa – has a very high level of inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient. However, according to the Africa Wealth Report 2023, Namibia recorded 2,100 resident millionaires in U.S. dollars, an increase of 20% over the last decade, and received a separate chapter titled “Africa’s new frontier.”

Namibia’s economy is highly dependent on South Africa and, with about 3 million inhabitants, has only a small consumer market. Mining, fishing and tourism collectively serve as the backbone of the economy. Due to a lack of diversification and industrialization, the level of job creation is very low. The government is still the largest employer.

The resource-based economy benefits a minority of local stakeholders. Unemployment rates are higher than ever. It is estimated that more than half of the younger generation is without paid work. Close to half of the population lives in poverty, with about 40% in informal settlements. Namibia’s score on the Human Development Index has continually declined, and it now ranks 142nd out of 193 countries.

Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	12402.5	12569.4	12408.3	13372.4
GDP growth	%	3.6	5.4	4.4	3.7
Inflation (CPI)	%	3.6	6.1	5.9	4.2
Unemployment	%	20.9	19.7	19.4	19.1
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	6.8	8.4	18.5	14.7
Export growth	%	-2.1	23.2	13.3	0.1
Import growth	%	20.2	23.0	22.5	7.9
Current account balance	\$ M	-1395.1	-1602.8	-1895.6	-1920.0

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

3

'06 '26 10

4 3

1

Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
Public debt	% of GDP	69.6	69.4	67.2	67.7
External debt	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Total debt service	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-9.5	-6.7	-1.8	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	28.1	27.2	33.0	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	25.1	23.0	21.8	21.5
Public education spending	% of GDP	10.4	9.4	-	9.1
Public health spending	% of GDP	4.4	4.2	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	0.6	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	3.2	2.9	2.7	-

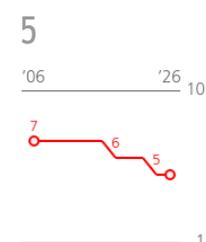
Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

The local Business and Intellectual Property Authority (BIPA), which is tasked with fostering a market-friendly economic environment, was limited by lawmakers' slow pace in adopting a legal framework to reduce investment obstacles. There is a gap between declared policies and the constraints investors face. Uncertainty over legal reforms adds to investors' reluctance, fostering a wait-and-see attitude. The New Equitable Economic Empowerment Bill (NEEEB), intended to create economic and business opportunities for disadvantaged groups, has been undergoing a process of drafting and revision for more than a decade. Also understood as affirmative action, the bill has faced reservations from the business community, which is concerned about being forced to partially relinquish company ownership. As a result, the bill has not been adopted. It seeks to reduce the enforced local participation of previously disadvantaged groups.

Meanwhile, the informal sector has grown considerably, with the majority of the population now engaged in such activities. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Namibia faces challenges due to the relatively small domestic market, high transportation costs, high energy prices and limited pool of skilled labor. However, suspicion has also limited foreign and local investment beyond the mining sector, in which multinational companies have made considerable investments in the exploration of commercially viable oil and gas fields (mainly offshore) as well as in

Market
organization



the mining of uranium, rare earth metals and other rare, strategically important mineral deposits. There is a rush to secure licenses for green hydrogen production, but the process is still in its initial phase, with much speculation as to whether the enormous investments will be made and justified, despite the country's competitive location. Oil was recently discovered in the country, but it is not yet clear whether commercial exploitation will be taken up by the oil companies. Furthermore, it remains to be seen how this will align with the development of the green hydrogen sector, which is less established than the oil industry. The government has made clear that it will not abandon development of the oil industry, since this is a major contributor to national income, and that Namibia will not jeopardize its right to socioeconomic development. Much of the potential growth is in resource extraction, which has been characterized by a lack of transparency and accountability in the awarding of licenses, fostering suspicion among civil society watchdogs concerning corruption and other forms of self-enrichment by state officials.

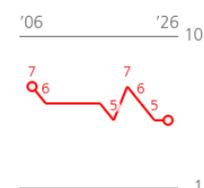
The informal sector and small enterprises in general account for a large part of economic activity, while communal and commercial agriculture are the country's main employers. In 2023, around 60% of the workforce was active in the informal sector, which contributed 24% of GDP.

The absence of a reliable, transparent legal framework and the lack of consistent, impartial application of regulations erode confidence and trust in competition policy. Although there are laws and institutions that monitor companies to prevent excessive concentration and monopolization and to safeguard consumers, these have little visibility in practice. This creates doubts about whether their enforcement is effective and consistent. This points in turn to a broader institutional weakness and a lack of implementation capacity.

Government budgetary support for various state-owned enterprises distorts sectors of the economy. Many operate with deficits and require state subsidies to remain afloat. These subsidies typically do not directly benefit consumers; instead, they cover instances of mismanagement and allow for disparities between salaries and service delivery. This situation tends to reinforce monopolistic tendencies and can facilitate the misuse of resources, such as through "tenderpreneurship." Salaries and fringe benefits in state-owned enterprises are substantial.

Competition policy

5



1

Namibia maintains an open trade system. The country joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. In 2022, its most-favored-nation (MFN) binding average tariff rate was 7.64%.

Namibia is a signatory to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, which became operational in January 2021.

The nation's trade relations are governed by its membership in the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Southern African Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union and the new EU-OACPS Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States. Initially, in November 2023, the Namibian government joined other countries in refusing to sign that agreement, arguing that it would violate constitutional principles (without providing specifics). Following subsequent negotiations, it then signed with the others.

While Namibia generally follows a free-trade policy, there are a few exceptions, particularly in the form of differentiated tariffs and preferential treatment for certain critical domestic sectors. The government has also implemented import and export restrictions that primarily affect agricultural products such as white maize, wheat and mahangu (pearl millet), along with products derived from these grains. In 2024, imports of certain fresh fruit (e.g., tomatoes) from South Africa were restricted to protect and support local production. Namibia imposes licensing requirements on all imports, although most licenses are granted automatically. A limited number of products require non-automatic licenses.

Customs regulations in Namibia are outlined in the Customs and Excise Act (Act No. 20 of 1998) and generally align with international conventions regarding recommended practices for importing and exporting goods.

Namibia's key trading partners are the European Union and South Africa, and trade volumes with China are rising.

It also benefits from the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

Namibia's banking sector comprises the Bank of Namibia (BoN), seven authorized commercial banking institutions, a branch of a foreign banking institution and two registered credit bureaus. The legal framework for banking operations is provided by the Banking Institutions Act of 1998 (amended in 2010), while the BoN operates under the Bank of Namibia Act of 2020, which saw minor amendments that year. The BoN, the country's central bank, enjoys a strong reputation and oversees the country's monetary policy.

As of 2022, Namibia had an average bank capital-to-assets ratio of 9.6711%. In 2023, the non-performing loan (NPL) ratio rose from 5.6% to 5.9% year over year. The Namibian dollar (NAD) is a non-convertible currency and is pegged to the South

Liberalization of foreign trade

8



1

Banking system

8



1

African rand (ZAR). The banking system maintains close links with the South African financial sector and aligns with international standards, despite some issues related to organized crime.

The purchase of foreign currencies such as the U.S. dollar and euro is subject to strict regulations.

Namibia's banking system is considered stable and is overseen by regulatory bodies such as the Namibia Financial Institutions Supervisory Authority (NAMFISA) and the Ministry of Finance. The government's fiscal liquidity challenges in recent years have been partially managed by the BoN.

Namibia has embraced cashless payment systems, which are widely accepted and used, reflecting a well-functioning banking system. However, access to banks in rural areas is limited to towns.

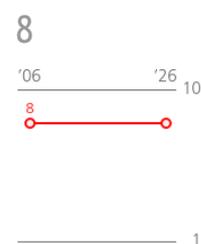
In February 2024, the country was gray-listed by the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) plenary and placed under increased monitoring due to remaining concerns about the effectiveness of implementation and compliance with international anti-money-laundering (AML), combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) and combating proliferation financing (CPF) standards. Initiatives are currently underway to comply with the required oversight measures.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Monetary stability depends largely on the stability of the rand, South Africa's currency. After independence, Namibia introduced the Namibian dollar (NAD) as a local, non-convertible currency pegged to the South African rand (ZAR). Its exchange rate depends entirely on fluctuations in the value of the ZAR and the inflation rate in South Africa. Namibia's annualized inflation rate was 3.4% in December 2024, averaging 3% over the year. According to the World Bank in 2024, inflation measured by the consumer price index (CPI) was 5.9% in 2023, up from 2.2% in 2020. Upward pressure has been driven primarily by increases in food and beverage prices, while transport costs have remained stable. The ZAR (and thus also the Namibian dollar) steadily depreciated during the previous decade but has remained stable since 2020, with an exchange rate of around 20 ZAR to €1.

The monetary link – and the rand's decline – has triggered discussions about whether Namibia should seek to end this dependency (following the example of the pula in Botswana). The Bank of Namibia, which operates as an institution independently of the government, has consistently rejected the idea of severing this link, citing concerns about potential risks. Despite the appointment of the bank's governor by the Namibian president, the bank makes its decisions without direct orders or interference from the government. Historically, the decisions made by the Bank of Namibia have been accepted by official policymakers.

Monetary stability



In 2020, the former governor of the Bank of Namibia was appointed finance minister. His successor was a local businessman and an adviser in the government's investment council. Both have remained in office since then and seem to agree on fundamental aspects of fiscal policy. Monetary policy in Namibia remains conservative, but fiscal stability has faced increasing pressures. Of late, the decrease in the annual inflation rate and the first minor reduction in the country's high level of debt are trends toward increased monetary stability. During the review period, the Bank of Namibia reduced its key policy interest rate from 7.0% to 6.75% to stimulate the domestic economy. The cost of borrowing remains quite high in Namibia, which makes investment and access to capital for smaller industries and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) difficult. In February 2024, Namibia was gray-listed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary. Concerns were raised over a lack of compliance with international anti-money-laundering and financing of terrorism standards.

Since the period from 2015 to 2016, Namibia has entered a downward spiral of rapid debt increase seeking to offset the effects of droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic, a situation exacerbated by the fact that during the "fat years," no provisions were made for the meager years. In 2024, total debt amounted to NAD 165 billion, equal to 60% of GDP. State policy initially set a threshold of 30% as the upper limit, with the African Monetary Cooperation Program and the IMF setting their recommended ceilings respectively at 60% and 55%. In recognition of the high debt level, Moody's and Fitch reduced the country's credit rating in 2017 to junk status. In 2024, the rating recovered slightly, with Moody's assigning Namibia a B1+ and a positive outlook, while Fitch retained the 2022 default rating at BB-, but adjusted the outlook from negative to stable in 2024. Debt service costs were the third-highest allocation in the 2024/25 annual budget, at NAD 12.8 billion.

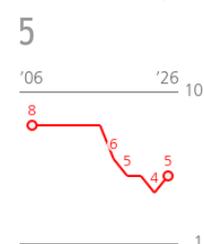
According to the Bank of Namibia, the current account averaged a deficit of NAD 1.7 billion during the period from 1999 to 2024, reaching a record low of NAD 11.3 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023. Foreign-exchange reserves reached an all-time high of NAD 60.9 billion in October 2024.

9 | Private Property

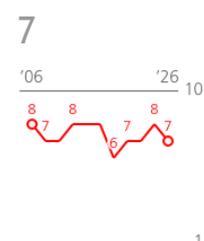
Namibia's constitution protects private property rights in a chapter on fundamental civil rights that cannot be altered, even in a state of emergency. Expropriation requires fair market-related compensation and has rarely occurred since independence for commercial farmland. Public demands for land restitution have created fears among white commercial farmers that their land ownership could be revoked. However, government policy to date has not substantiated this.

Debate over the New Equitable Economic Empowerment Framework (NEEEF) has generated apprehension. Initially, the draft bill included a mandatory equity provision stipulating that 25% of ownership in local companies be held by individuals from

Fiscal stability



Property rights



previously disadvantaged groups. Concern that the provision might deter investment and force business relocation led to this provision's removal. The delayed and revised bill has provoked a "wait-and-see" attitude among local and foreign investors.

Property transactions in Namibia are well regulated and adhere to clear standards. There have been occasional instances of questionable deals, particularly involving urban land transactions. Signs of embezzlement and self-enrichment among members of the new elite have been evident through the allocation of municipal or communal land at prices far below market value.

To some extent, privately owned companies remain skeptical about the reliability of government policies and express minor concerns about investment security. With the exception of foreign mineral and mining companies, which are engaged in resource exploration, this has led to a decline in new investments. Foreign direct investment (FDI) had nearly come to a halt until recently, but is picking up again, not least because of interest in natural resource exploitation.

Bureaucratic red tape, including work permit requirements that pose a significant entry barrier to qualified foreign labor, has had a negative impact on FDI.

The National Investment Promotion and Development Board (NIPDB) has introduced a Digital Nomad Visa to attract more international experts. However, since 2016, local companies have responded to negative economic trends by increasing transfers of capital abroad or even by relocating. This has reinforced the persistent trend of net capital exports.

While the government acknowledges the crucial role of the private sector and the need to promote foreign investment, its policies do not convincingly support this objective. State-owned enterprises continue to receive substantial financial bailouts, and there is no indication that the government is developing an alternative privatization strategy. The newly elected government under President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has the revival of Air Namibia as a top priority on the economic agenda for the coming years, and the government remains the main employer in the country. There has been no stated intention to streamline the public sector. Compared with its small population, Namibia's public sector is significantly oversized, with 19 ministries, each headed by a minister and deputy ministers, which increases payroll and pension costs for civil servants as key expenses in the annual budget.

Private enterprise

6



1

10 | Welfare Regime

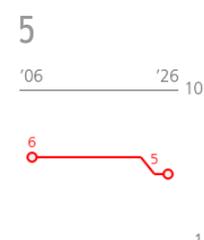
Health care expenditure per capita has declined due to fiscal constraints. The 2024/25 annual budget allocated NAD 10.9 billion to health and social services (4% of an estimated GDP of NAD 276 billion). At slightly more than 10% of government spending, it ranked fourth among budget allocations after education, finance (including debt service) and security. Old-age and disability pensions were both increased by NAD 200 to NAD 1,600 per month, but this has been insufficient to compensate for the increase in the real cost of living due to inflation. In fact, the purchasing power of pensions has declined overall. Social transfers also include several other regular provisions, and food aid and drought relief are separate items of expenditure. However, segments of the population struggling to survive in the informal economy remain marginalized and benefit little from such programs. A considerable proportion of the population lives in poverty and lacks access to health care facilities. Undernourishment and hunger remain common, leading to significant growth disorders among children. Around 1.2 million people in Namibia – translating to 40% of its inhabitants – face high levels of food insecurity. The high rate of unemployment also excludes many from the benefits of regular formal employment. The universal Basic Income Grant, which aims to eradicate poverty and inequality and stimulate the economy, is strongly supported by the Civil Society of Namibia and other stakeholders. It has not yet been implemented, as it raises many budget questions.

In 2024, the Ministry of Education estimated the literacy rate at 91%, with no significant gender disparities. This seems too high when compared with tests among school leavers, which revealed that even after as many as six years of schooling, not all students had achieved functional literacy. The enrollment rate at the secondary and tertiary levels of education is higher for young women than for young men. Often, teenage pregnancy ends young women's educational advancement and negatively affects their employment future opportunities.

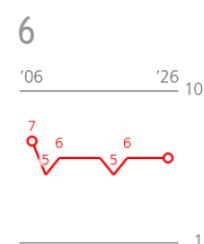
Namibia ranks among the top performers in terms of female representation in parliament and the cabinet. In late November 2024, Namibians elected their first female president (to be sworn in on March 21, 2025). She even received a vote share about five percentage points higher than her SWAPO party did in the parallel National Assembly elections. Notably, she opposes abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

Access to schools is a persistent bottleneck, and often not all students are admitted. Hostel accommodations are even scarcer. In more remote areas, educational facilities, including hostels, suffer from significant infrastructure neglect, resulting in inadequate learning environments and a lack of basic amenities. Children often have to walk long distances to reach school and may remain hungry throughout the day. A similar disparity in service provision applies to the health sector. Indigenous

Social safety nets



Equal opportunity



communities in remote areas are particularly disadvantaged, as seen with the San community. In several parts of the country, children of school age are often sent to work rather than school. While ethnicity can be a basis for discrimination, it can also enhance opportunities through preferential treatment within and by influential communities in the public service and private sector.

Women's formal employment rate is equal to that of men, and more women are moving into senior positions. However, salary discrepancies for similar work persist in the private sector. After years of liberal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ communities, incidents of homophobic discrimination are on the rise. A Supreme Court ruling that the foreign spouse in same-sex marriages between couples who live in Namibia should be treated the same as spouses of the opposite sex drew public opposition, and parliament drafted a bill to bypass the ruling. The country's marital act was also changed to explicitly state that same-sex couples cannot marry.

11 | Economic Performance

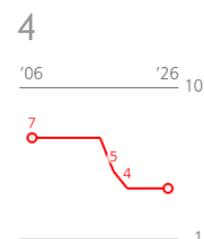
Initial economic growth raised average annual per capita income, elevating the country to higher-middle-income status. But wealth distribution and income inequality make Namibia – after South Africa – the most unequal country globally in terms of the Gini coefficient. GDP per capita has declined since 2012 (\$6,017) due to recession and sluggish economic growth, with difficulties exacerbated by droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a gradual recovery, with GDP per capita reaching \$4,743 in 2023, thanks to recent economic growth rates of around 3% and a reduction in inflation to 3% in 2024. The 2023 Labor Survey showed that Namibia had the SADC group's highest unemployment rate, at 36.9%, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

As mentioned elsewhere, the debt accumulated over the past 10 years poses a serious challenge. Fiscal prudence aimed at halting the rise in debt now limits the ability to engage in reforms and social welfare policies. Unemployment rates are higher than ever, and foreign and local investment rates remain low, except for investments in the exploration of oil and gas deposits, other mining-related activities, and the production of green hydrogen. Hopes for a significant economic boost are mainly tied to these activities, but all have a medium- to long-term perspective.

The public sector and state-owned enterprises remain major employers, while formal private sector employment remains limited. The revenue quota peaked at 34.6% of GDP in 2014 and has since fallen below 30%.

Since the Namibia Revenue Agency was institutionalized in 2021, tax income has increased. The framework for the private sector is not conducive to business activities, as the income tax rate is high and the labor law is less supportive of private companies. Small companies struggle to meet many requirements in areas such as

Output strength



affirmative action, gender equality and restrictive labor laws, making companies less competitive globally. Hence, the cost of human resources and the risk of investing in the formal private sector are high from an individual perspective, with an income tax rate of nearly 37% for middle-class salaries, plus rates for health and social security, along with a value-added tax (VAT) rate of 15%.

According to the Bank of Namibia, the current account averaged a deficit of NAD 1.7 billion during the period from 1999 to 2024, reaching a record low of NAD 11.3 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023. FDI inflows amounted to NAD 5.9 billion in September 2024.

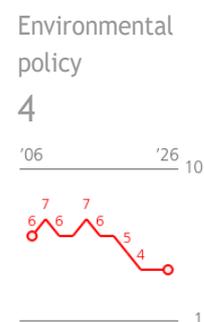
12 | Sustainability

Namibia has ratified numerous international environmental conventions. The government has signed key environmental agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourses. Since 2005, Namibia has collaborated with Bretton Woods institutions to conserve the coastal landscape, and has participated in initiatives such as the Kimberley Process. In 2013, the UNCCD's COP11 event was held in Windhoek, and in 2016 Namibia hosted the first continental African Drought Conference.

In December 2024, Namibia was the first African host of the (38th) High Level Ocean Panel on Sustainable Ocean Economy. While there is a degree of official commitment, with legal provisions in place, natural habitats do not always receive protection. Deforestation in the northeastern region has led to significant environmental degradation. A copper smelter in the mining town of Tsumeb has had highly toxic effects on the environment and on residents, who have suffered serious health consequences.

Requirements for environmental assessments are often sidestepped, disregarded or negotiated in practice. A long-standing dispute over offshore marine phosphate mining remains unresolved, and licenses for oil and gas exploration were granted in late 2020 in the ecologically sensitive Okavango River delta region. If successful, fracking could jeopardize the natural balance of the entire region. Similarly, plans by a Russian company to use fracking for uranium mining in the Kalahari place the regional aquifer at risk, with irreparable loss or pollution of groundwater posing an existential threat to rural farming communities. The cabinet is divided over the application, and the minister of agriculture, who opposes the plan, was slated to retire in March 2025.

These cases illustrate a lack of coherent policy and coordinated state response regarding extractive industries, creating opportunities that would not exist if regulations were strictly implemented and enforced. In a similar vein, offshore oil



and gas exploration licenses were granted in 2022 to two major international oil companies. At the same time, the government has touted its ambition to turn Namibia into the continent's green-energy hub, despite skepticism from local experts regarding water resources, infrastructure and expertise for these megaprojects.

This policy approach contrasts with public ecological and environmental debates, which have not yielded strong outcomes. The administration and governing institutions have persistently taken a lenient approach to the issue. This raises doubts about the effectiveness of environmental initiatives and contrasts with the government's green economy aspirations.

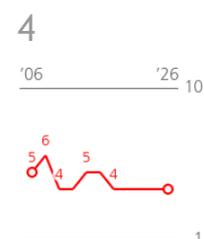
Public disputes over the discovery of oil and its potential exploitation in the Okavango Delta, fracking in the Kalahari, and plans for a megaproject producing green hydrogen in a natural park that threatens the destruction of unique flora and fauna, as well as protests against pollution from the Tsumeb smelter, underscore the interest in preserving nature among parts of the public and civil society.

Environmental concerns are also amplified by the media through civil society organizations, tourism agencies and individual engagement in nature conservation.

Reliable, up-to-date data for this criterion are scarce. Education has consistently received the largest single budget allocation since independence. In the 2024/25 annual budget, NAD 23.2 billion out of a total of NAD 97 billion was allocated to education, including higher education. But most of this is spent on salaries and pension payments for teachers and government-employed staff in the education sector. Serious efficiency problems limit the delivery of education, mainly at the school level. Primary school enrollment rates are very high, but most students do not reach higher secondary levels. On average, students receive around eight years of schooling. Namibia has elevated its polytechnic institution to the status of a full-fledged university, as the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). This establishes it as the second state university alongside the University of Namibia (UNAM), which was founded in 1992. UNAM has satellite campuses in various regions. University students often express dissatisfaction with the lack of financial support services and limited employment opportunities after graduation. High youth unemployment rates are a challenge.

As of 2022, the United Nations' Education Index ranked Namibia 129th globally, with a score of 0.568, a decline from its previous ranking of 127th. Research and development (R&D) investment in Namibia amounted to 0.34% of GDP in 2014; this has decreased in recent years, although no updated data are available. The budgets of the country's two universities have recently been reduced, posing significant constraints on their ability to maintain current service levels. While Namibia performs relatively well compared to other African nations, ranking fourth out of 154 countries in the 2021 Global Knowledge Index (GKI), it still faces challenges in its knowledge infrastructure, as indicated by the substantial gap between investments

Education policy /
R&D



and performance. Issues such as poor student examination results and inadequate facilities for school enrollment at the beginning of each year have drawn negative attention. The government regularly acknowledges the challenges facing the education system, including weak educational outcomes.

While many university graduates remain unemployed or underemployed, vocational training – a realistic alternative for securing employment – is still underdeveloped.

Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

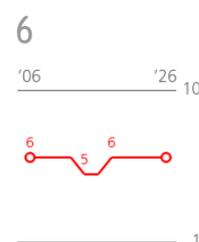
The historical structural constraints inherited at independence remain partially in place after a century of settler-colonial rule. These constraints manifest in the unequal distribution of commercially viable land and other socioeconomic disparities, such as high levels of inequality and poverty. These issues have not been fundamentally changed by a new elite that has found a place within, rather than fundamentally transformed, the economy, property relations and wealth distribution. In combination with the vast area and a population of just 3 million people in a drought-stricken environment, governance faces multiple challenges. The country's post-independence economic growth came to a halt in 2015, and since then public debt has significantly increased, becoming another limiting factor for reforms.

While there has been a gradual economic recovery in recent years, resulting in an adjusted annual budget for 2024/25 that, for the first time, exceeds NAD 100 billion, little has changed in the structural constraints since the last review period. The effects of climate change have more visibly put rural livelihoods at risk, and water scarcity is also a constant limiting factor for urban livelihoods and industry. Developing and maintaining adequate infrastructure remains a challenge.

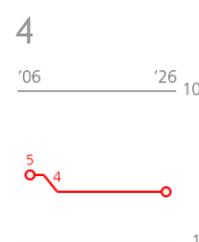
These constraints have been met with few, if any, satisfactory coping strategies in the current government's policy, which remains largely aligned with a business-as-usual strategy. The party manifestos of the major parties for the November 2024 elections offered no fundamental alternatives.

During the era of settler-colonial minority rule until 1990, civil society organizations were largely limited to activities within the white minority community. Black agencies were united in the anticolonial struggle, while African churches were among the few spaces for gatherings and socially accepted activities. After independence, Namibians who had been involved in various forms of civil disobedience and the struggle for self-determination, including activities related to culture, education and trade unionism, transitioned into public service or official politics. Consequently, it took some time for civil society to establish itself as a vibrant force in the country. This growth has been constrained by the material challenges faced by the majority of Namibians. The daily struggle for survival that many Namibians face limits their social engagement.

Structural
constraints



Civil society
traditions



Despite such economic constraints, Namibia's political system and a constitutional framework that embraces civil liberties have allowed local initiatives to unfold with minimal interference. This has fostered the gradual expansion of civil society activities in various fields, which initially also benefited from external support seeking to strengthen the new democracy.

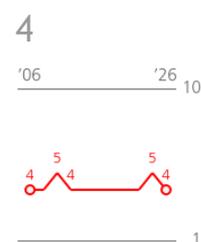
Today, Namibia boasts human rights NGOs, an LGBTQ+ movement, environmental and ecological advocacy groups, and a feminist movement, all of which engage in public participation on relevant issues, although their activist base remains relatively small. More recently, post-colonial initiatives have become active in decolonization efforts targeting the physical remnants of colonial rule. While civil society organizations may not be particularly strong due to the material constraints affecting a majority of the population, they have a presence in most, if not all, sectors of society. This presence is supported by the freedom of speech and the presence of independent media, which offer platforms for civil society groups to express their views and concerns. However, this does not necessarily translate into significant direct influence on political decision-making. The capacities of civil society organizations in terms of management, networking and fundraising are low, and most are heavily dependent on donors. In some cases, civil society has become a venue for employment or income that does not exist elsewhere. Sustainability is a central concern in the civil society arena. There is also a lack of coordination among the various civil society organizations, which tend to work in silos instead of pooling facilities and resources. The younger generation, in particular, is strongly motivated to contribute to the uplift of communities in both urban centers and rural regions. However, the organizational framework lacks an effective and efficient coordinating body.

Policymakers and lawmakers continue to show a lack of engagement with civil society. Campaigns by LGBTQ+ agencies seeking legal recognition have suffered major setbacks under recently passed legislation. Demands to liberalize abortion rules have also been ignored. Furthermore, concerns raised by environmental groups are often brushed aside in favor of what is considered economically promising from a short-term perspective.

Since independence, Namibia has not recorded a single politically motivated killing. Although physical violence in daily life is not uncommon, it remains almost entirely absent from political competition. On rare occasions when minor physical scuffles occur for political reasons, they become a matter of public debate and receive widespread condemnation. While the elections featured an unprecedented level of political competition, the November 2024 National Assembly and presidential elections remained peaceful. This also included the protest by those who considered the balloting to have been marred by irregularities.

There are rare cases of hate speech and the articulation of racist or ethnically motivated sentiments bordering on tribalism. To some extent, the latter issue has become more prominent during the German-Namibian negotiations over a Joint

Conflict intensity



Declaration recognizing the genocide committed in the colony of Southwest Africa, since major agencies of the Ovaherero and Nama were excluded from direct representation in these talks. There were also a few aggressive outbursts in the National Assembly debates that violated the code of conduct. But generally, with the exception of the increase in homophobic acts and even a few homophobia-motivated murders, the social contract based on peaceful interaction remains intact and unquestioned.

In general, Namibia is a very inclusive country in terms of the mindset of its policies and people. Unfortunately, due to the high level of inequality and economic constraints, access to information, data and resources is practically limited to a small portion of the population.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

With independence, the government institutionalized a National Planning Commission (NPC), tasked with drafting five-year national development plans (NDPs). Lacking leverage over line ministries, the NPC never had the required authority or the capacity to ensure coherent support for the plans and their goals. Since the turn of the century, these plans have also competed with other blueprints: Vision 2030 was drafted as a legacy of President Sam Nujoma, the first president, while President Hage Geingob, during his two terms in office, created the Harambee Prosperity Plans (HPP 1 and HPP 2). To varying degrees, all these general plans shared an element of wishful thinking, lacking any realistic goal-setting or specific outline of how such objectives could be achieved.

With the death of President Geingob in office (February 2024), the HPP 2 initiative lost relevance. The 2024 SWAPO election manifesto did not mention it. NDP 6 has been delayed and announced for early 2025, while Vision 2030, as the legacy of Nujoma, remains a reference point with no practical program in place to achieve any of the declared goals.

In the past, several national programs formulated over-ambitious agendas and failed to deliver. These included providing affordable housing, eliminating informal settlements, reducing unemployment and fighting corruption. More recently, the declared energy policy illustrates a number of contradictions: Large-scale exploration of oil and gas by international mining companies, both on land and offshore, is welcomed with hopes of finding meaningful, commercially viable deposits. In anticipation, the government is already considering joining OPEC. At the same time, interest in the country as the most suitable location for the production of green

Question
Score

Prioritization

5

'06 '26 10



1

hydrogen is being enthusiastically celebrated, and megaprojects are in the initial stages. The government has proudly declared its aim to become the continent's energy hub through a mix of fossil and green energy, while largely neglecting the impact of such large-scale resource-extraction operations on groundwater, natural habitat and marine resources (potential environmental risks, not least for agriculture and fisheries). Under President Geingob, green hydrogen was put at the top of the agenda, with the appointment of a specific commissioner for green hydrogen and the establishment of the Namibia Investment Promotion and Development Board (NIPDB) to promote and ease foreign investment and engagement in that matter. As the review period closed, with President-elect Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah's administration incoming, the issue's prominence and priority on all agendas have somehow declined.

Clientelism remains part of the former liberation movement's strategy for retaining political power. Hiring into the senior ranks of the public sector still at times shows preferential treatment for those loyal to the party. Competence is not always the main criterion for employment, and recruitment at times lacks transparency and faces criticism. The large number of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) provides another channel to reward those loyal to the governing party through appointments. These institutions are often run like small empires, lacking sufficient oversight and accountability and offering high salaries and generous fringe benefits.

Interministerial collaboration remains limited at best, and certain sectoral priorities conflict. For example, the Ministry of Mining prefers controversial exploration plans by foreign mining companies, including fracking, while the Ministry of Agriculture opposes some of these plans for environmental reasons. Similarly, concessions to produce offshore phosphate conflict with the interests of the fishing industry.

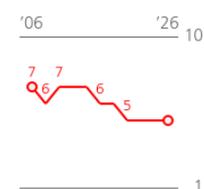
Many declared policies are either not implemented or implemented inadequately, and measurable results fall short of defined goals.

Policy learning benefits greatly from the ability to acknowledge failures and be open to corrective measures. Namibian policymakers show few, if any, of such virtues, and tend to be self-righteous. Given the state president's far-reaching executive powers, practical tools exist to replace cabinet members for non-delivery, but they are rarely used.

There are many ministerial policy papers, often drafted by expatriates, with little to no internalized ownership by policymakers. This hampers effective implementation and limits the capacity or willingness to be open to innovative proposals. Non-delivery and other failures are rarely, if at all, seen as opportunities to benefit from lessons learned. Structural coordination among ministries is lacking; they operate in a highly territorial manner, without sharing significant assessments, knowledge and responsibilities, even though their fields mostly overlap, for instance in the areas of poverty, gender equality and education.

Implementation

5



Policy learning

4



15 | Resource Efficiency

Namibia has a bloated, inefficient public service, which in part serves as a tool for clientelist relations. The civil service is the largest single employer in the formal sector and is therefore of crucial strategic relevance to the governing party. Since the late 1990s, fundamental reform of the public service has been recommended but largely ignored for fear of losing voter support. Annual budget expenditures for salary-related civil service costs hover around an unsustainable 40% of total government spending. Since 2015, amid conditions of economic decline, public finances have focused on current expenditures and relied on increasing debt, mainly for non-productive expenses, without any meaningful investments in infrastructure or development. As a result, the increased debt burden has not created any new potential income opportunities or assets.

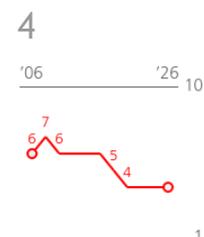
Personnel are not always sufficiently qualified, and new hires are sometimes made for reasons other than selecting the most qualified candidates. The Office of the Auditor-General is understaffed, and its reports are often delayed. Its criticism is usually ignored, and the office has no leverage.

At times, allocated funds are underspent or unused. Despite new regulations, tender procedures often continue to lack transparency, and the best bids are sometimes ignored. There are also cases of non-delivery, partial delivery and substandard delivery by contractors and local facilitators who receive substantial payments for their services.

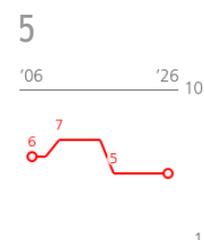
Another issue is senior civil servants and political officeholders' foreign travel, the outcomes and impacts of which do not always reflect the resources allocated for the purpose. These figures attend events, conferences and summits of questionable value, and the main focus often becomes gaining additional income through subsistence and travel allowances. This sets bad examples that are often criticized in public discourse.

The coherency of governance strategy is severely constrained by a lack of coordination. Blurred lines of authority between ministries, overlapping competencies and conflicting decision-making powers undermine efficiency, at times even preventing decisions from being implemented. Competition for authority and power in decision-making processes is particularly evident in ministries related to the country's natural resource-based economy, such as the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources; the Ministry of Mines and Energy; and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform. At times, they reach conflicting conclusions on policy. In the absence of meaningful collegial interaction for mutual clarification, bureaucratic blockades and inaction result.

Efficient use of assets



Policy coordination



While the National Planning Commission is responsible for the National Development Plan, which is considered to be the most significant of all strategic blueprints, this body lacks oversight authority and cannot enforce measures to ensure adherence to declared goals and strategies.

Occasionally, personal rivalry and animosity among cabinet members overshadow the authority of specific portfolios, undermining policymaking, objective policy formulation and implementation.

A recent example of the lack of coherent coordination is the simultaneous granting of prospective and exploratory mining licenses for oil and gas to several international mining and energy companies while also entering into declarations of intent to establish green hydrogen megaprojects. This inconsistency is compounded by the stated goal of turning the country into Africa's green-energy hub while simultaneously seeking OPEC membership.

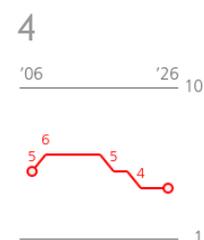
Namibia has a range of policies and a robust, modern constitution as the supreme law. The problem lies mainly in the implementation of the policies. The executive lacks a lessons-learned approach. Development plans from the National Planning Commission lack allocated budgets and evaluation tools. The plans' rigidity does not allow for adaptation to a rapidly changing environment. In many respects, they are unrealistic, such as the industrialization course outlined in the Vision 2030 strategy. Furthermore, there are too many different plans, confusing the public. These plans are not coordinated with each other, and no interim evaluation or correction takes place. The incoming SWAPO government is continuing to make bold promises in its party manifesto, such as providing free tertiary education for all, bringing the unemployment rate under 10%, eliminating half of Namibia's shacks by 2029, reducing Namibia's imports by 80%, and formalizing and providing services to 50% of all informal settlements in order to tackle the nation's growing housing crisis.

It remains unclear which measures and programs are expected to facilitate such reforms, and how all these ambitious targets will be financed given the realities of a limited budget, rising debt and a stagnant economy.

Corruption is a major concern in public debate and among voters, including among respondents to Afrobarometer surveys. Independent media play a role in exposing questionable dealings involving government ministries, state-owned enterprises or the awarding of tenders. Civil society seeks to expose and curb the misappropriation of funds for personal gain by political officeholders and public servants.

This critical awareness contrasts with the leniency shown by the governing party when dealing with instances of self-enrichment and abuse of power for their own benefit or that of others. The largest corruption scandal to date, known as the "Fishrot" scandal, led to the dismissal of two ministers and several high-ranking officials in late 2019 and early 2020, who have since been awaiting trial in prison. Nevertheless, suspicions that prominent party members may have benefited from the scandal have not been met with full transparency or a commitment to accountability.

Anti-corruption
policy



Party members convicted of fraud or other violations of law, including corrupt practices, often retain their positions or return to them later. For instance, in late 2020, the president appointed a minister previously discharged after a conviction for abusing her post to obtain undeserved benefits in the allocation of public assets to SWAPO's Politburo, the party's highest body. This stark contrast between verbal commitments to combat corruption and the lack of decisive action remains widely criticized, eroding the government's credibility in addressing corruption. Additionally, the Anti-Corruption Commission, a state institution, is hampered by understaffing and underfunding, limiting its effectiveness. The director of the Anti-Corruption Commission is appointed by the president, indicating the body is not fully independent. It often focuses on small fry, not big fish.

The large number of state-owned enterprises is another entry point for corruption, because these organizations offer profitable positions to members or former members of the executive, creating dependent linkages and conflicts of competence.

16 | Consensus-Building

Namibia's constitution explicitly enshrines pluralist democracy, along with all fundamental civil rights and freedoms. These principles are respected by all parties and influential social groups. In the National Assembly elections in November 2024, all party manifestos affirmed the importance of democracy and attested to the generally accepted democratic spirit among the electorate. That said, the dismal organization of the elections and a series of dubious irregularities questioned in court indicate that support for democratic principles and conduct does not necessarily translate into fully democratic practices. At the time of writing, courts had yet to rule whether this was due to incompetence or deliberate action.

Namibia's constitution protects private property in clauses that cannot be changed even under a state of emergency or by the two-thirds majority of lawmakers required for constitutional reforms. The political party manifestos issued for the National Assembly elections in November 2024 testified, with minor exceptions, to full endorsement of a market economy. Two smaller parties and one larger opposition party indicated that the socioeconomic transformation of certain sectors (in particular inequality in land distribution) would require interventions that might conflict with full recognition of private property titles. In another case, a party declared that it sought to attract foreign direct investment capital while at the same time using the terms Marxist and communist to characterize its economic policy. This shows a general feature shared by most party programs: a lack of coherent economic policy programs, leading to contradictions between declared policies. The preferential treatment of members of groups close to the dominant party and the new Black elite is indicative of practices that do not always abide by the strict principles of a "free" market economy. Nevertheless, all influential economic interest groups, regardless of

Consensus on goals

7



1

political affiliation or background, generally identify with the current governance strategy regarding economic affairs. However, a social free market economy does not truly exist in Namibia. Many parts of the economy are over-regulated, with state-owned enterprises dominating the market.

None of the parties campaigning for voter support cultivates anti-democratic sentiments. What remains a matter of speculation, however, is the degree to which SWAPO, the hitherto dominant former liberation movement, will remain loyal to democratic principles if its majority is threatened by the results of free and fair elections.

Since independence, the country has been governed under fully respected democratic principles, but disputes over the extent of irregularities in the November 2024 elections remain open. As the review period closed, courts had yet to rule on the extent to which the executive powers of the president were used unconstitutionally to undermine the elections, through what opposition forces contended amounted to voter suppression. This matter will also test the independence of the judiciary and the functioning of the country’s checks and balances. This in itself can be considered a sign that democratic principles remain intact and potential violations are under scrutiny. There is no visible or confirmed pressure by anti-democratic actors.

The gradual decline of the former liberation movement, which has served as the hegemonic governing party since independence, has produced more political competition, contestation and challenges from a growing number of political parties. Some of these parties made inroads in the National Assembly elections in November 2024. The election campaign featured a high degree of populist rhetoric and a new level of derogatory language. Opposition party programs share an element of anti-SWAPO sentiment, which enhances the we-they divide in the political sphere. Claims that the elections were irregular further exacerbate this divide.

Ethnic tensions were on the rise, not least because of how the German-Namibian negotiations over the genocide committed during German colonialism were conducted. Descendants of the main victim groups felt sidelined and not adequately represented, which fueled resentment bordering on tribal rifts. But, as in the general political sphere, this did not escalate into serious aggression or violence. In the few cases of hate speech associated with policy differences or ethnicity, including some incidents of racism, public and political responses were immediate and condemnatory. However, a gradual trend toward more cleavage-based conflicts should not be overlooked.

Anti-democratic actors



1

Cleavage / conflict management



1

In most cases, internal party decision-making lacks full participatory democracy, with party leaders often making decisions without consultation. To some extent, the “big men syndrome” remains visible and influential.

Neither the governing party, SWAPO, nor other political parties have a credible track record of engaging in meaningful consultation with members and agencies of civil society, except, perhaps, in some cases with religious (Christian) and traditional leaders. This applies even to new parties that come from a social movement background. None of the criteria outlined for civil society involvement significantly influence Namibian policies. Intellectuals (mainly scholars who comment publicly) and journalists tend to be regarded by policymakers in government and the opposition more as a nuisance than as contributors to decision-making, scrutiny of implementation and performance monitoring in the public interest. Civil society relies almost exclusively on criticism within the public sphere in the hope of being heard, although the extent to which economic interests, business associations and professional groups engage in lobbying remains uncertain and difficult to assess reliably.

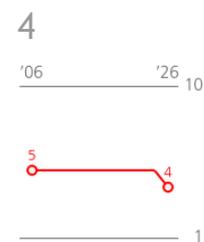
Despite increasing political diversity, sentiments toward civil society advice, activism and agenda-setting are shared among most, if not all, parties.

Leaders of political parties and decision-makers (regional councils, governors) sometimes wear two hats – as politicians and, at the same time, representatives of a CSO group – and choose one or the other depending on the matter at hand.

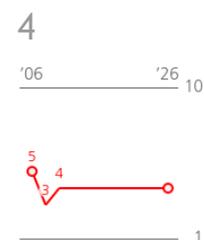
Reconciliation, as a notion and as a term, is used in ambiguous and ambivalent ways in Namibian politics and society. At independence, reconciliation with the formerly privileged white elite was a leitmotif of the government and President Sam Nujoma, and proved a significant factor in maintaining stability. But in the absence of any initiative to engage with past injustices through a kind of institutionalized stocktaking, victims remained without a voice or recognition. This has especially been the case for the so-called ex-detainees, a few hundred survivors among the thousands of SWAPO members who were accused without evidence of betrayal and incarcerated while in exile. Most did not survive the dungeons and torture, and many were executed or simply disappeared. The few who are still alive and who returned home remain marginalized, with no sign of remorse offered. As another case, those who served during the anticolonial struggle in the South African army or the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) are not recognized as war veterans, a term applicable only to SWAPO supporters. They receive no pension, while the category of SWAPO war veterans is broadly defined and offers substantial benefits.

More recently, the German-Namibian negotiations over a joint declaration in recognition of the genocide committed during the German colonial era (which has been dubbed a reconciliation agreement) caused frustration and rejection among significant segments of agencies representing the descendants of the victim communities. These figures saw the process as betraying the true meaning of

Public consultation



Reconciliation



reconciliation, and their exclusion from the negotiating table as the opposite of reconciliation. The agencies representing the descendants of the victim communities have demanded reparation, and do not fully agree with reconciliation as proposed in the declaration text. Furthermore, they demand that descendants living in the diaspora be included in the terms of the joint declaration. Through renegotiation, the text has been amended in a few technical aspects, but as of the close of the review period, it had not yet been signed or passed through the two houses of parliament.

17 | International Cooperation

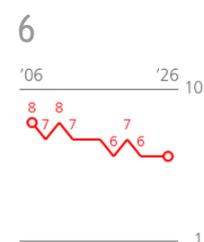
Namibia has received substantial development aid since independence with the aim of helping it to consolidate its post-colonial society. But initial inefficiency and a lack of commitment to meaningful reductions in inequality have led to reduced support from some Western (in particular, Nordic) countries. The government readily accepts external support and welcomes assistance from anyone willing to offer it. Lately, a marked increase in collaboration with China and Russia has diversified and shifted external interactions. Due to its relatively small population of 3 million, Namibia has one of the highest rates of aid per capita globally. The government criticizes the country's classification as a higher-middle-income country because this excludes it from preferential aid treatment, including access to concessional loans.

Despite high levels of aid received (still mainly via the European Union, Germany, U.N. agencies and the United States), the development strategy has not always aligned with international donors' approaches, and the efficiency of aid programs often remains limited. Declared poverty-reduction policies contrast with continued gross inequalities and insufficient service provision for a considerable proportion of people.

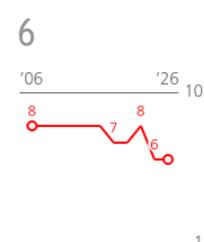
Different development plans have created more confusion than coherence. While they share some complementary aspects and overlap, their coexistence has blurred, rather than consolidated, a coordinated approach to development. To some extent, development strategies remain contradictory and lack a coherent overarching policy vision (for example, in the energy sector, where the search for oil and gas is taking place alongside efforts to become a main producer of green hydrogen).

Namibia's international policy, relations and cooperation follow the slogan "Friends to All and Enemy to None." With its own independence in part a result of international solidarity and the proactive role of the United Nations, Namibia advocates U.N. Security Council reform and generally pushes for a more prominent role for Africa in global governance. It has signed, and largely adheres to, international agreements and normative global frameworks. Despite an initial announcement that it would withdraw from the International Criminal Court, that withdrawal has not been carried out. Rather, the country has actively supported South Africa in its case against Israel's warfare in Palestine, and has strongly condemned Germany for its declared support of Israel.

Effective use of support



Credibility



But this strong tendency to take sides is not applied evenhandedly. Close relations with North Korea, the People’s Republic of China and Russia have influenced the country’s votes in the U.N. General Assembly. Namibia has refrained from condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and has not supported resolutions concerning Myanmar or the treatment of the Uyghurs in China, which it has declared an all-weather friend. Direct collaboration with North Korea in violation of a U.N. Security Council resolution ended only when Namibia was threatened with sanctions. In 2022, President Geingob officially declared Russia to be an ally. Such foreign policy choices have led to concerns that Namibia’s international image may have been compromised, particularly in terms of its declared neutrality.

The country was one of the last to sign on to the African Peer Review Mechanism but has since undergone a thorough and positive evaluation. Namibia’s foreign policy is mainly oriented toward the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Union. Its commitment to human rights is sometimes ambiguous (of late, increased discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community is an example). However, the country received a record number of votes when re-elected as a member of the U.N. Human Rights Council, highlighting its engagement with global governance. Because of historical ties, Namibia maintains close relationships with Cuba and Venezuela, without offering a critique of Venezuela’s authoritarian regime or its unfree election.

Namibia is firmly integrated into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and is a member of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and all other regional organizations. Decisions at the SADC level are not automatically transmitted into national law. There are no sanction mechanisms; compliance is voluntary. While firmly committed to regional integration, Namibia is less active as a contributing player in consolidating regionalism. It has mainly strengthened ties with neighboring Botswana, particularly in terms of cross-border movement of citizens (only a personal ID is needed), while relations with South Africa – in part for historical reasons and because of economic linkages bordering on dependency – were and remain a particularly strong factor. The SWAPO governing party has signed a mutual defense agreement with the other former liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, and has repeatedly backed Zimbabwe’s Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government in covering up manipulated election results and human rights violations. Namibia’s last National Assembly elections were dubbed by some critics as “ZANUfication.” Namibian President Nangolo Mbumba was among the first to congratulate Mozambican President Daniel Chapo on his re-election, but then decided, after much criticism, not to attend his swearing-in. Regarding voting behavior in the United Nations, Namibia in most cases follows South Africa’s position.

Regional cooperation

8

'06 -9 '26 10

8

1

Strategic Outlook

Namibia has reached a critical juncture regarding its political future. The former liberation movement and ruling party, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), has exhibited an autocratic style of leadership and governance despite its overwhelming electoral victories during the first 30 years following independence. A failure to deliver on its promises has gradually eroded its popularity, and recent elections have increased the influence of new parties. The degree to which SWAPO remains committed to democracy as the prevailing political system has thus been called into question. The electoral flaws and significant deviations from orderly electoral procedures displayed in the National Assembly and presidential elections in November 2024 are cause for concern. Despite significant further losses, SWAPO maintained a narrow absolute majority, with the last members of the first struggle generation leaving political office.

Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah will be the country's next president, serving for the term from 2025 to 2030. She is the first woman to hold the office, and in fact won more votes than her party. Given her role in exile, her leadership in the party since independence and her ideological orientation, she signals continuity. Her marriage since 1983 to the retired chief of the Namibian Defense Force has fueled speculation about the potential role of the security apparatus. Nandi-Ndaitwah has never been involved in unethical practices. She has pledged to fight corruption in unprecedented terms.

A recession since 2016 has triggered a debt spiral. Restoring fiscal prudence and attracting foreign direct investment require attention, as economic policy uncertainty has served to slow investment. Fiscal flexibility and financial liquidity are limited, although modest economic growth and an improved tax base allowed the revised annual budget for 2024/25 to reach NAD 100 billion for the first time. The impacts of climate change have strained the environment, and reliance on natural resource exploitation has put the country on an unsustainable development trajectory. The government must make crucial decisions regarding the country's development path, especially with regard to its reliance on natural resources versus environmental protection. Transparency and accountability have been lacking, necessitating a credible strategy to regain confidence. Hopes of becoming Africa's energy hub were fueled by promises of oil and gas discoveries as well as potential investments in large-scale green hydrogen projects. However, the policy on exploration licenses remains unclear, as does the process for awarding major public tenders, which continues to fuel suspicions of corruption and self-enrichment.

The image of a country guided by constitutional principles and the rule of law has been dented by the homophobic response to the Supreme Court's interpretation of civil liberties, including extending marriage rights to same-sex spouses who were married abroad but now reside in the country. Bypassing the ruling by enacting a new marriage law that narrows marriage rights and thereby borders on contempt of court has created insecurity regarding the previously unchallenged autonomy of the judiciary. Progress has been made in terms of judicial decentralization, as divorce cases are now brought to regional magistrates and are no longer a jurisdictional matter for the High Court. This gives regional courts more power and is a step toward access to judicial functions for

citizens in smaller towns and rural areas (eliminating the need to travel to the capital, Windhoek). There have been improvements in court facilities for children and victims, making the environment more welcoming. In Otjiwarongo, an environmental court has been established.

Interventions in press freedom have added to a dented image that must be rehabilitated.

The country's strong ties with China – marked by an “all-weather friendship” – and the growing influence of Chinese companies in vital sectors have fueled anti-Chinese sentiment. The decision not to condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine but to enter into closer relations has provoked questions about Namibia's international positioning and adherence to global normative frameworks.