



Ethnicity and its Impact on Political Party Choice: Namibia

Ethnopolitics in Namibia

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Abstract

The study evaluates the impact of ethnicity on the political party choice in Namibia. The study develops from the fact that most African countries, including Namibia, struggle to exercise their democracy because of several factors that limits the strings of democracy, among them ethnic politics. The study noted that ethnicity has a strong prevalence in Namibia, and consequently, it also significantly influenced the political choices made in the country, especially in line with voting patterns, party choices, and formation of political parties. Conclusions drawn from the study findings indicate that political party choices in Namibia were mainly determined by the ethnic background from which the party was formed, which for instance, SWAPO party enjoyed continuous political success because it was formed and supported by the Ovambo tribe, which is the largest tribe in the country.

Keywords: ethnicity, political party, voting patterns, political choices

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Namibia's territory, spanning approximately 824,000 square kilometres, is home to a population of about 2.5million people (Melber, 2018). Eleven major ethnic groups comprising various subdivisions speak close to thirty different languages, out of which 14 possess a complete orthography (World Atlas, 2018). Around 50 percent of the population comes from the Oshiwambo-speaking tribe. Most of the people in the country reside in the Northern region. Significant differences and inequalities are observed to be influenced by the country's political landscape (Melber 2018). The use of tribalism and ethnicity as the elementary means of political mobilisation is an inescapable aspect in the Namibian socio-political domain. However, how tribalism and ethnicity became so elevated in Namibian politics is a theme not well comprehended by the broader Namibian population (EPR Atlas, 2016). For a long time, the resignation by civil society, activists, and scholars on the role of ethnicity in governance effectiveness and the choice of political parties in Namibia and the broader African continent has contributed to a stagnating discourse concerning the approaches to address methods of managing ethnic identities with regard to sharing of resources, opportunities, and power.

The United Nation's supervised vote for a Constitutional Assembly that occurred in November 1989 laid the ground for transformation under a lawfully elected government. The South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) obtained total majority of votes (Melber, 2018). Multi-party democracy formed the basis of independent Namibia's political landscape on March 21, 1990, with the formative values being enshrined in a laissez-faire constitution safeguarding civil liberties and rights. However, despite the insistence on cohesion by different leaders since independence, Bannon, Miguel, and Posner (2018) point out that political choices

in the country are made along tribal lines. The majority Ovambo tribe largely makes up SWAPO. To ensure political survival, individual politicians tend to foster a cult-like following where they depend on their tribe's people in maintaining their political offices. In return, the leaders favour their supporters during allocation of government resources. Therefore, the ethnic politics has morphed into rivalry between communities for both access to resources and representation in political decision making. The problem is not exclusive to Namibia, however, as research by Hoffman and Long (2013) and Gay et al. (2016) demonstrates. Most African countries have faced ethnic issues in politics since their independence which presents significant difficulties in the management of diversity.

According to Elischer (2013), Namibia has a political landscape characterised by mono-ethnic parties in which the support base emanates from their specific ethnic regions, at both local and regional levels. All parties are designed with the objective of influencing policy, capturing ministerial positions, or attaining majority in government. In concurrence with this argument, Melber (2018) reveals that most of the tribes in Namibia are aligned to a different political party implying that political party choice in the country is more a matter of tribal affiliation rather than ideology and policy. Based on this observation, it is plausible to make the assumption that people in Namibia vote for parties that have links to their tribal groups. The reason why this is the case requires a more detailed investigation as findings along this direction would help in the development of strategies aimed at forming political parties that have a national appeal as opposed to the current ethnic parties.

1.2. Research Purpose

The purpose of the research thesis is to identify how ethnicity influences political leaders in formation of political parties in Namibia. To accomplish this general target, the investigation will seek to address the following specific objective; *To establish how people's political party choices in the country are influenced by ethnic or tribal affiliations*; In meeting this objective, this research will be guided by the following research question; *How does ethnicity impact the choice of political parties in Namibia?*

1.3. Significance of the Research Study

The findings of this research will contribute to the information that will encourage the country of Namibia to institute a strong, credible, incorruptible, and independent judicial body that has the authority to investigate cases of prejudice based on ethnicity. The findings will also enable the formulation of practical recommendations that will enable political parties in the country be more inclusive. Finally, since the issue of ethnicity has been a major problem in Namibia since independence, the findings will help in formulating recommendations on how the government can commission a peace and reconciliation tribunal to address ethnic concerns that influence decision-making in the country. The overall aim of this research is to establish exactly how ethnic identities determine political party choices in Namibia. The expected outcome is that the findings will go a long way in influencing future ethnic inclusivity policies in the country.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1 Introduction

People in many communities create their identities around their ethnic groups. It is a usual phenomenon to find each ethnic group alienated from the rest because of the differences in their ways of life. The cultures practiced and the way of life of each ethnic group in many instances differ thus leading to different preferences for different communities. Ethnicity can be defined as a person's identification with a larger group which can either be religious, cultural, or tribal (Constant, 2014). Ethnic groups form divisions based on either one of these characteristics otherwise known as ethnic cleavages. What determines which cleavage defines an ethnic group most depends on their interests and which one carries more weight than the other. In the 19th Century boundaries within the African setting were not given much importance. However, with the scarcity of resources and with increasing competition for power there is a tendency to scramble for powerful positions between different ethnic groups. It is believed that distribution of power and resources depends greatly on who rules hence there have been numerous leadership conflicts in the continent (Young, 2014).

The political institutions in a nation play a great role in governing and managing national resources. That is why it is important to have a political environment which is representative of the entire population of the nation. The structure of the political institutions greatly determines the decisions individuals will make as far as politics is concerned. They will always consider the existing factors and how they are likely to benefit or be detrimental to them. Most scholars believe that political orientations in ethnically divided societies are mostly determined by the

ethnic cleavage rather than the other cleavages. In the African context, Young (2014) argues that the ethnic cleavage is the most dominant in the determination of political outcomes.

Ethnic groups vary in size. While some have big populations making them the majority; others have very small populations occupying small sections of the overall nation's land, hence their being regarded as minorities. More often than not, the groups with very large populations have much greater impact on political matters compared to the minority groups. Those societies which are diverse in their ethnic constitution are most affected as opposed to some whose diversity is negligible. It's natural for the minorities; whether it is in the lines of religion, language, race or ethnic boundaries, to feel left out. This could be because of unequal distribution of resources in their regions. When one group feels less represented they are likely to organise themselves into social/political bodies that will enable them seek audience. In societies with particularistic parties, participation is exclusive to specific group, a character that is detrimental and poses threat to the peace and stability of a nation (Elischer, 2013).

The most common argument when it comes to ethnicity and political party choices is that members of an ethnic group are usually more inclined to supporting people and parties that share their ethnic identity. They are potentially peaceful participant in elections and all matters that are related to the politics of the day as long as they are fully represented in national decision making. Whether it is an authoritarian or democratic political environment, ethnic politics are likely to emerge but in varying magnitudes depending on other barriers that may aid or interfere with the ability of the group members to make definite decisions (Birbir, 2006).

As was stated in the earlier section, the main aim of this paper is to investigate how people's political choices in Namibia are influenced by the respective ethnic groups they come from. With the difference in opinion of scholars this thesis seeks to shed more light and

contribute to the debate by examining various studies done and comparing the same to establish their consistence. The thesis will use Namibia as a case study due to its diversity. In Namibian politics, ethnicity is relevant as it is elsewhere in the continent, and is a complex and unhinged theme using incessant groups and transforming personalities, which include linguistic and tribal groupings and the manner in which they relate and overlap. Despite the Namibian government and its Constitution being strongly dedicated to a united nation under the “One Namibia, One Nation” slogan, there are alterations pertaining to their access to power and political representation that can be explained through exploring ethnic cleavages (Schwerdt, 2013; Akuupa & Korne, 2015; Geingob, 2018). This exclusive focus on ethnic identity of a party indicates that during elections people vote for candidates from a particular party on the mere basis that they affiliated to their ethnic communities.

2.1.2 Ethnicity in Politics

From the introduction presented above, it is evident that ethnicity plays a profound role in the political direction of most countries both in African and the rest of the world. Numerous literary works have evaluated the role of ethnicity in shaping the political landscapes of many different countries. While the issue of ethnical bias in the support of different political parties might be seen as one of the features of relatively young democracies, Gay, Hochschild, and White (2016) reveal that, in the US, African-Americans show political homogeneity as far as their overwhelming support of the Democratic Party is concerned. From this assertion by Gay et al. (2016), it is clear that the intersection of ethnicity and political affiliation manifests in both developed and developing democracies meaning that an evaluation of the literature should look at the issue generally instead of within the narrow context of developing countries. However,

before delving into that, a general understanding of what ethnicity means should be sought from the literature.

2.1.2.1 Elements of ethnicity

Generally, researchers do not show any agreement when it comes to the decision of what makes up an ethnic group. Ratcliffe (2014), however, attempts to provide a comprehensive definition by first investigating the origin of the term 'ethnic'. This leads to the definition that ethnicity entails associations between people that are guided by common historical origins, language, or religious affiliations. This definition presents the notion that the term can be applied to a wide range of commonalities including language, geographic location, and common history and culture as presented above. This multidimensional nature of the ethnicity concept is supported by Constant (2014), who, in her evaluation of ethnic identity points out that it is related to a person's physical appearance and sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. From this attempt to define ethnicity from different literary works, it emerges that the definition of the concept is dependent on context. For example, while people speaking a similar language might consider themselves as belonging to one ethnic group at one time, they might belong to different ethnic groups when their specific cultures are considered. This argument is consistent with one of the assertions by Kiang (2014) that ethnic identity is dynamic rather than a static characteristic of a group of people. According to Kanig (2014), the nature of ethnicity changes in relation to social interactions between individuals and therefore its characteristics are dependent on the socialisation of different groups of people rather than specific cultural values shared by communities.

From the arguments presented by Ratcliffe (2014), Constant (2014) and Kanig (2014) above, ethnicity is found to be a dynamic attribute that manifests in societies. Ethnicity is seen to

be influenced by different factors such as culture, geographical proximity, and similarities and differences in language, among others. That means that in the evaluation of ethnicity, it is important to consider its multidimensional nature. For that reason, it is important to define the specific context in which ethnicity is being evaluated for accurate conclusions on how ethnicity influences political party choices can be reached.

2.1.2.2 Ethnicity and political participation and party choices

In many different countries across the world, it has been observed that people participate in particular political parties due to the fact that they identify with them in one way or another. In a research study conducted by Gay et al. (2016) in the American context it is revealed that there is an overwhelming preference for the Democratic Party among African Americans. This finding indicates that while matters such as political preferences are supposed to be personal, the ethnic groups in which people belong to have a profound influence on whether or not they vote and who they vote for. Hajnal and Horowitz (2014) goes head to argue that this support is based on the fact that the Democratic Party is viewed as more inclined towards addressing the interests of minorities compared to the Republican Party. From this argument, it becomes obvious that political ethnicity in the case of African-Americans is based on the perception that one party has general policies that favor them as an ethnic group in the US. Gay et al. (2016) and Hajnal and Horowitz (2014), in this case show that the general party policies within a given political party play a significant role in influencing the political party choices of people from different ethnic groups.

Evidence of the strong association between ethnicity and political affiliations and decisions is observed more openly in African countries. In a critical assessment of the 2008 presidential election in Ghana, Hoffman and Long (2013) find out that while the National Democratic

Congress (NDC) was overwhelmingly supported by the Ewe ethnic group, the Asante ethnic group supported the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The support for the two parties by the two different ethnic groups, according to Hoffman and Long (2013) results from the fact that the two parties are attached to each of the communities in different ways. For example, the NDC was founded by a person from the Ewe community hence the great support from this community. From this argument, it is evident that the decision by members of the Ewe community to support NDC is based on the mere fact that a member of their community founded the party. From this revelation by Hoffman and Long (2013) it is plausible to argue that the ethnic affiliations of the founders of political parties influence people sharing the same ethnicity to support the party. Other important considerations such as policy, in such settings, take a secondary role while the primary aim is having a person from the community holding political power. The findings by Gay et al. (2016) and Hoffman and Long (2013) are thus seen to concur thus proving that the issue of ethnicity in politics is not exclusively African but is also experienced in much more developed democracies. This is an indication that ethnicity in political party choices is not determined by the length of time that a country has practiced democracy but is rather determined by structural factors in political parties in different parts of the world.

In a 2018 report by the Kenya Human Rights Commission, it is appreciated that ethnicity is the main driver of Kenyan politics in addition to being a major determinant of who wins elections (KHRC, 2018). As pointed out in KHRC (2018), the politics in Kenya have historically been guided by ethnic divisions. After independence, for example, the alliance between the Luo and Kikuyu which are two of the largest ethnic groups resulted to the formation of the Kenya African National Union (KANU). This situation presents a case where political leaders from two majority ethnic communities unite leading to the formation of a political outfit that is

automatically supported from the members of the two ethnic groups. The rival party, the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), on the other hand, brought together the other ethnic groups that had different political views from the Luo and Kikuyu groups. Evaluating this situation in the context of Hoffman and Long (2013), it is evident that KANU and KADU focused on specific ethnic groups rather than regions. This is so because the Kikuyu and Luo occupy two different regions in the country that are far apart. The situation in Kenya immediately after independence as presented in KHRC (2018) thus concurs with the argument by Hoffman and Long (2013). Representation data presented in KHRC (2018) shows that since KANU won the elections in 1966, out of all the cabinet ministers in the country, Luo and Kikuyu tribes together contributed 42.9%. The other over 40 tribes were left to share the remaining 57.1%. In that regard, it is evident why people in Kenya and other African countries are more likely to vote for political parties formed by members drawn from their ethnic communities.

Similar to the Kenyan case, Isiaq, Adebiyi, and Bakare (2018), point out that political parties in Nigeria use ethnic sentiment to woo voters and it is therefore common to find people from particular ethnic groups almost unanimously supporting one party. However, unlike in Kenya, the main political parties in the country focus on regions meaning that while particular parties are more appealing to ethnic groups in a particular region, other parties appeal to ethnic groups in a different region. A good example presented by Isiaq et al. (2018) is that the National Party of Nigeria has most of its members from the northern Nigeria. In concurrence with Isaiq et al. (2018), Uwaifo (2016) points out that the creation of the Nation of Nigeria involved the forceful combination of more than three hundred different ethnic groups with different leadership structures, cultures, and identities. While this unit has functioned as a cohesive unit generally, the distribution of political power in the country is determined by the number of ethnic groups that a

particular political party is able to garner support from (Uwaifo, 2016). This dependence of political parties on ethnic groups as a means of gaining political power has led to the increased focus by political leaders on ethnic groups whenever they plan to form a new political party. More specifically, even despite the fact that the country's 1979 constitution insisted on the creation of political parties that are nationally inclusive, the purely ethnic political outfits that existed before 1979 were merely given new names but maintained their ethnic focus in their politics (Uwaifo, 2016). In that regard, it is evident that, with the aim of being favoured by specific ethnic groups, political leaders in Nigeria, just like in Kenya, form political parties that are meant to appear to be more aligned to the interests of specific ethnic groups in the country. Such alignments especially with the interests of majority ethnic groups increases the chances of these political parties being voted into power and maintaining this power for a long time.

Despite the strong association between political choices and ethnicity in Africa, it does not mean that the problem is exclusively African. In a research study conducted by Boudreau, Elmendorf, and MacKenzie (2018) on the influence of candidate ethnicity on the voting decisions of people from different ethnic groups in American local elections, it was found that there was a high likelihood for individuals to be biased by ethnicity in their choices. More specifically, the researchers found that people from minority groups were more likely to vote for candidates from their ethnic groups. If such a situation is extrapolated into the African context where the formation of political parties is much easier, then it is reasonable to assume that these minorities would most likely be members of a political party founded by members belonging to their ethnic groups. This assumption thus shows that the use of ethnicity in making political decisions would be as likely in developed countries as it is in developing countries.

In a similar study in the UK context, Nandi and Platt (2018) find that ethnic minorities in the country are more skewed towards political ideologies that are in opposition to those of the majority. This implies that, even in Europe, there is a strong correlation between ethnicity and political choices that people from different groups manifest. In the specific context of political parties, the findings presented by Boudreau et al. (2018) and Nandi and Platt (2018) it is evident that the problem of ethnicity in making political party choices is not exclusive to Africa. However, the arguments presented in KHRC (2018) and by Isiaq et al. (2018) reveal that it is relatively easy to form political parties in African countries than in more developed democracies which are more structured. In that regard, it can be inferred that the issue of ethnicity in African politics is much more pronounced since political leaders have much more freedom to establish political parties that people from their ethnic group can easily identify with. In addition, it can also be inferred that limiting the ability to create political parties can lead to a reduction in the level of ethnicity in the African political arena.

More ethnicity in European politics has been observed with the increase in immigration. According to Nandi and Platt (2018), the emergence of minority groups in many European countries especially due to immigration has had a profound influence on the social identities of the native groups. In that regard, Nandi and Platt (2018) go ahead to point out that political competition between minority immigrant groups and natives has led to a distinction of political identities in countries such as the UK, Germany, Hungary, Greece, France, and Denmark. This means that, with the aim of maintaining some perceived control of their nations, native populations in these countries tend to support specific political parties. In concurrence with this argument, Bloemraad and Schonwalder (2013), in their research study found that in most European nations, ethnic minorities were underrepresented. Even more profound are correlation

results presented by Szocsik (2017), which find that the success of any ethnic group in the political context in Central and Eastern European countries, is dependent on their size. In that regard, minority groups usually fail to gain enough support in the acquisition of key positions in government. This implies that while political parties seen to be skewed towards the interests of minorities would be supported by ethnic minorities, they do not have any significant support from majorities hence the low representation. The findings by Nandi and Platt (2018), Bloemraad and Schonwalder (2013), and Szocsik (2017) reveal that, even in Europe, political support for parties is determined by ethnic affiliations. This means that voting patterns in the region are determined by whether one belongs to majority or minority ethnic groups. Similar to Africa, therefore, voting patterns in Europe can also be argued to be determined by ethnic affiliations rather than specific party policies.

From the above evaluation, most sources are seen to agree that ethnic groups have a profound influence on people's political party choices. The evaluations by Hoffman and Long (2013), KHRC (2018), Isiaq et al. (2018), reveal that the issue of ethnic politics is prevalent in most African countries including Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana. In these countries, previous research shows that most people in Africa choose the political parties to support based on their ethnic identities rather than specific ideologies of parties. For that reason, political leaders in the continent usually fashion their parties to target specific ethnic groups rather than the entire nation. Similar to Africa, the more developed democracies in Europe and America are also found to be affected by ethnic affiliations. Research studies by Nandi and Platt (2018), Bloemraad and Schonwalder (2013), and Szocsik (2017), however show that ethnicity in Europe emerged as a response to immigration which has prompted the natives to strive to maintain control of their nations by supporting political parties composed of individuals drawn from majority ethnic

groups. The literature therefore proves that although ethnic political parties are more common in African countries, the issue is still significant in developed democracies. This means that ethnicity in making political party choices is more a global issue. From the finding that political parties supported by majority ethnic groups stand the greatest chance of controlling a country's political landscape, it can be presumed that the most successful political parties in Namibia are the ones associated with the largest ethnic groups in the country. This lays the basis of conducting a case study on Namibia focusing on the ethnic identities of political parties and how these identities influence people's voting patterns.

2.1.3. Theoretical Underpinnings of Ethnicity in Politics

According to Norris and Mattes (2003), the issue of the design of effective democracies started gaining increased attention all over the world in the 90s. Systems where power was concentrated to an individual or a particular group of people were found to be ineffective leading many nations to seek reforms that would enable them achieve democratic governance. However, it has been shown in the literature evaluated in the previous sections that ethnicity has made it almost impossible to achieve absolute democracy. To make recommendations on how best to address ethnic politics in countries like Namibia, it is essential to evaluate the issue within theoretical frameworks that have been found to be effective in different parts of the world. One of the most recognised theories is that by Horowitz (1993) that explains the correlation between political party structures and ethnic compositions in developing communities. As outlined by Horowitz, ethnicity poses a significant express effect on party support within highly ethnically divided states by causing a lasting psychological feeling of fidelity to a certain party that anchors members to a party. Birnir (2006), on the other hand, argues that people under ethnically

mobilised political systems feel that they have better access to legislative power than under pluralist systems. In such a case, politics ceases to be a matter of policy but rather of representation. However, such a system, especially in cases where a particular group feels underrepresented, has been found to lead to the emergence of undemocratic actions or even violence by the minority groups (Becher & Basedau, 2008). Brubaker and Latin (1998), in concurrence, appreciate the fact that violence is one of the usual outcomes of ethnic politics. However, the authors argue that in order to address the issue of undemocratic actions emanating from ethnic political affiliations, then a distinction must be made between political violence and ethnic conflict. This appreciation is an indication that any intervention at the political level against ethnicity must target to eliminate outcomes such as political violence. One means by which such outcomes can be avoided, as pointed out by Bieber (2008) is through power-sharing. Since political power in nations divided in terms of ethnic groups is more concerned about representation rather than policy as argued by Birnir (2006), a framework of joint-administration is a plausible suggestion that ensures all ethnic communities are proportionally represented in a nation's leadership. In countries such as Namibia, such power-sharing mechanisms have not yet been established hence the observed dominance of one ethnic political party over others.

Namibia is one of the democracies with tribal parties, which are well-defined as political groupings that obtain their support from recognisable tribal groups and tend to serve the interests of those specific groups. For example, parties in Ghana, Trinidad and Guyana often receive between 80 percent and 90 percent of their votes from a single ethnic group. In Namibia, the Ovambo are known as the majority voters for the SWAPO, and based on their number, propel it to power. In order to understand the dynamics of political ethnicity, Caspersen (2008) proposes an investigation of whether such divisions in voting patterns are based on mere centralisation of

power or differing views in the protection of collective interests. In the case that ethnic division in voting is caused by the need to concentrate power in a few communities, then the power-sharing suggestion presented by Bieber (2008) and the joint administration suggestion presented by Birnir (2006) might be difficult to achieve owing to the fact that the majority ethnic group might interpret the inclusion of minorities in power as a threat to their interests. In that way, in accordance to the postulates presented in the empirical democratic theory discussed by Chandra (2005), the survival of democratic institutions becomes difficult. In countries such as Namibia, therefore, the application of the empirical democratic theory will require an investigation of the level of democracy in the country.

Jarve (2003) gives perhaps the best example of the mechanisms by which ethnic politics has been promoted outside Africa. The Slovak government developed a number of policies that aimed to consolidate the state's identity by having a single language. The minorities, specifically Hungarians, interpreted this as an attack to their culture and identity thus leading to tensions between the state's majority and minority ethnic groups. The overall outcome of this fallout was a rift between the majorities and minorities in terms of political affiliations. A research done on the 1998 Elections and the 1999 Act on the Use of Languages of National Minorities in Hungary demonstrated that, despite the fact that the HZDS acquired the best portion of votes (27 percent) in the parliamentary election in 1998, it was crushed by a coalition made up of four groups which out of the total 150 seats, was able to get 93 (Newsline, 1998). These four parties formed an alliance government on 30 October under Mikuláš Dzurinda who as prime minister. This resulted in Hungarian parties showing interest in the legislature for the first time with the parties such as The Hungarian Coalition Party (MKP) taking key legislative offices in the new government. Patriot populist course. The MKP had made vital political concessions by giving a revelation

before the decisions that it would not "push for ethnic self-rule either in its political programme or by practice" (Newsline, 1998).

Observational research on political parties in nations, for example, Switzerland (Ladner and Brandle, 1999), United Kingdom (Anstead, 2008) and Australia (Gauja, 2006) appears to produce comparable ends as to the debilitating impact on decision of political parties. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) developed the classical structural theory of voting behaviour, which can be tweaked to establish how a factor like ethnicity influences the choice of political parties. For example, in Western Europe, the sectarian cleavages dividing Christendom between Protestants and the Catholic, class inequalities characterising workers-owners, and regional cleavages of centre-periphery were powerful as they portrayed fissions of ideology shaping politics in parties. The social class reflected the elementary divisions between the left, which favoured an influential role for the government through economic redistribution, interventionist fiscal administration, and social welfare policies, and the right, which preferred a more constrained role for the state and a free market economy (Norris & Mattes, 2003). Similarly, the religious division demonstrated liberal and conservative moral debates, including those concerning marriage, the family, and role of women. Lipset and Rokkan' structural theory is universally dominant as the recognised convention in comprehending party competition and voting behaviour in established democracies. The theory can be utilised to offer insight into party affiliation and support in Namibia which ascribes to the dictates of the theory.

As indicated by Anika Gauja (2006), decision of political parties blocks basic leadership inside parties, impedes parties from picking applicants they view as most alluring to the electorate and moves key political choices to a little political activists to the detriment of the more extensive political enrolment. Restriction to intra-party vote based system depends on a key

attribute of western ideological groups looked with consistently declining participation and the undeniably focal job that political activists take as the result. Agrarian communities are exemplified by subsistence livelihoods mostly based on fishing, farming, restricted geographic and social mobility, low literacy levels, unskilled work, and low standards of living. As such, the populations in these societies, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, are perceived to be deeply related to their ethnic groups through the primary association of belonging and blood, as well as those of religion, family, and kinship (Cooper, 2014; Schwerdt, 2013; Elischer S. , 2013).

2.1.4. Gaps in the Literature

From the reviewed literature, it has emerged that political party choices in many countries are influenced by ethnicity. While it would be expected that ethnic politics would be a problem that is more prevalent in young democracies such as those in Africa, the literature reveals that countries in Europe and the US also face the problem of ethnically-driven political parties as a response to immigration. In this case, ethnicity in political party choices is seen as an effort by native groups to maintain control of the governments in their respective countries. In countries such as Kenya and Nigeria, most people choose to support specific parties depending on how well the parties are seen to support the interests of their ethnic groups. From this, the literature shows that the influence of ethnicity on political party choice is significant. However, there are no research studies specifically investigating how ethnicity influences the general population in Namibia to support specific political parties instead of others.

2.2 Critical Assessment of the Literature

2.2.1 Distribution of Ethnic Politics

It has been established in the literature review section that the issue of ethnically driven politics is common across the world. This means that ethnicity in political party choices has been observed in multiple countries but to different extents. Within Africa, countries such as Ghana (Hoffman & Long, 2013), Kenya (KHRC, 2018), and Nigeria (Isiaq et al., 2018 and Uwaifo, 2016) are presented as having political regimes that are strongly influenced by ethnic affiliations. In all these African countries, research evidence presented in the respective sources shows that individuals seeking to ascend to power focus on tribal interests rather than national policy in their campaigns. In the specific case of Kenya, since there is no single tribe that has enough votes to enable a person to party or individual to ascend to power, KHRC (2018) reveals that it is common to see political alliances between individuals of the major tribes before elections. The parties formed as a result of these alliances usually stand the best chance of forming the government since each member is able to appeal to their tribe to vote in favour of the alliance. Evidence of a similar situation is presented by Hoffman and Long (2013) in the case of Ghana, where he points out that the NDC is overwhelmingly supported by the Ewe community since the party was formed by a leaders from that tribe.

Outside Africa the issue of ethnically driven politics has been highlighted in a number of sources. Gay et al. (2016), for example, reveal that party preferences are observed to be governed by racial background. This observation is corroborated by Bourdeau et al. (2018) who allude to a racial divide when it comes to local elections in the US. Nandi and Platt (2018), on the other hand, present the case of the UK, where ethnic minorities are observed to be opposed to the political ideologies of the majority group. This situation, according to Bloemraad and

Schonwalder (2013), is observed in most countries throughout Europe. The main cause for political divisions in Europe is immigration which has led to an increase in the number of minority groups in many countries in Europe (Nandi and Platt, 2018). From these sources, it is evident that the issue of ethnicity in politics is very common both in the US and in Europe. However, the kind of ethnicity in these continents is found to be profoundly different from that in Africa. While in the African countries presented, ethnicity in politics is seen to result from tribal differences, the issue in America and in Europe emerges from competition between natives and non-natives. From this difference between Africa and America and Europe, it is evident that indeed ethnicity can be looked at from different perspectives. A keener assessment of the elements of ethnicity and their importance in evaluating the Namibian case is therefore necessary.

2.2.2. Importance of the Elements of Ethnicity

The literature presented above shows that ethnicity dominates politics in most countries in Africa. This situation, according to sources such as Birnir (2006), Young (2014), Akuupa and Kornees (2015), and Geinob (2018) results from the fact that many countries in Africa are made up of people from multiple ethnic groups that usually compete for resources. The situation in Namibia is found to be similar to that of most countries in Africa since, according to Melber (2018) the country is made up of numerous ethnic communities with one major tribe making up around 50% of the country's population. In the context of the arguments by Birnir (2006) and Young (2014), therefore, the assessment of ethnic communities in Namibia by Melber (2018) suggests that it is highly likely that the political landscape in Namibia is shaped by ethnicity.

While Birnir (2006), Young (2014), Akuupa and Kornees (2015), and Geinob (2018) present strong arguments for how ethnicity influences political affiliations, they fail to appreciate

the complexity of the ethnicity concept by not being explicit about the exact nature of the ethnicity addressed in their research. According to Ratcliffe (2014) and Constant (2014), for example, ethnicity is a multidimensional concept that can be defined in the contexts of shared geographical location, common language, common culture, or similar historical background. For that reason, in the assessment of Namibian politics, it will be necessary to define the specific kind of ethnicity being investigated. With regard to the elements of ethnicity presented by Ratcliffe (2014), therefore, it will be necessary to clearly identify the exact elements such as language, geographic location, and common history that define ethnic groups in Namibia.

A key observation from the literature, therefore, is that it is necessary to first be explicit about the kind of ethnic cleavage being investigated in order to gain meaningful insights on how it influences political outcomes. This importance can be clearly seen by taking a keener look at some of the ethnically influenced political regimes presented by a number of sources. In the case of the USA, Gay et al. (2016) and Hajnal and Horowitz assert that the Democratic Party receives overwhelming support from racial minorities while the most of the white majority support the Republican Party. In Ghana, on the other hand, Hoffman and Long (2013) point out that tribe is the most important factor when it comes to voting patterns. A comparison of the political affiliations in the two countries shows that while in the US ethnicity would be defined in terms of racial groups, ethnicity in Ghana would be defined through tribal elements such as language and culture. This confirms the argument by Ratcliffe (2014) and Constant (2014) that ethnicity can have multiple definitions which would depend on the specific context. This further bolsters the argument of the need to define the elements of ethnicity that govern the political landscape in

Namibia before engaging in the actual evaluation of how ethnicity influences political party choices in the country.

2.3 Synthesis/Theoretical Argument

The theoretical argument developed based on the above literature review analysis is defined by the following hypotheses.

H₁: Ethnicity plays a critical role in influencing the choice of political parties in Namibia

H₀: Ethnicity does not influence the choice of political parties in Namibia

The theoretical framework builds into the above hypotheses, focused on identifying the specific role played by ethnicity in determining the political direction of the country, particularly by guiding political leaders during formation of political parties. Key among the reasons why politicians tend to establish ethnic based political parties is that ethnic backgrounds guarantee unwavering support for the political party at all times, irrespective of the performance of the party, or the credibility of its political leaders.

Similarly, from this evaluation of sources on ethnicity in politics, one common theme that emerges is that of conflict. This observation makes the conflict theory a plausible theoretical framework on which to base the investigation of ethnicity in Namibian politics. According to Horowitz (1998), the conflict theory presupposes that ethnic groups are firmly bound to particular ideologies and objectives which makes them highly committed and loyal to any processes and situations that lead towards the achievements to the goals. In the specific context of political power, Horowitz (1998) argues that, since the objective of one group is to achieve as much power as possible, then actions such as exclusion of outsiders and domination of groups with other interests are common. This domination has been pointed out by Becher and Basedau (2008) as the main cause of conflict between members of different ethnic groups. From these

observations therefore, it is evident from the conflict theory that it is the collective interests of a particular ethnic group or tribe that leads to specific political choices. This therefore presents ethnicity/tribalism as the independent variable and political party choices as the dependent variable. An investigation of the case of Namibian politics in the context of these variables should help reveal how political party choices are affected by ethnic groups in the country.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research study used the explorative research design to gather and analyse the required data to complete the research study. The explorative research design is an effective tool for this study since it provided a platform upon which the study could undertake in-depth research into the correlation of political party formation and ethnicity, as the topic had not been extensively addressed by other scholars, especially within the Namibian setting.

In the selection of the specific research design that will be employed, a closer look at the research aim and the guiding research questions is necessary. From the introductory chapter, the aim of this research is presented as being responding to the question; '*How does ethnicity impact the choice of political parties in Namibia?*' In responding to this question, a sufficient level of detail will be required so as to give different perspectives of the subject matter. According to the distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research presented by Elkatawneh (2016), whereby quantitative research evaluates figurative findings from a study using statistical tools, while qualitative research evaluates ordinal findings from a study using qualitative analytical tools such as thematic analyses, the targeted level of detail can only be achieved through qualitative research. For that reason, the research will employ a qualitative research approach.

In this regard, the explorative research design will be instrumental in building up detailed information regarding the significance of ethnicity in determining the choice of political parties in Namibia?', how the ethnic inclined political parties perform in delivering services to the electorate, and the life line of the political parties, both in the short term and in the long-run. More specifically, the researcher will use this approach to assess the political dynamics in

Namibia from 2009 to present. This will involve identifying the different political parties that took part in different elections, identifying the tribal affiliations of their leaders and determining the level of success of the parties.

3.2. Choice of Method

Since the research study uses the qualitative research method to complete the study, it focused on case studies to develop and in-depth analysis of the research topic. The case studies were instrumental in identifying the different political parties that were formed in Namibia during the 2009 period, and analyse them based on their degree of ethnicity that informed their formation and operations in the country, including both failures and successes. It was highlighted in the previous section that the researcher will need comprehensive details about the political situation in Namibia in order to meet the overall research aim. The suitability of the case study method in achieving this objective is supported by Phelan (2011) who argues that the approach allows researchers to obtain in-depth details about the phenomenon of interest.

In developing a strong case for the political situation in Namibia, the researcher will use secondary sources addressing the issue of elections in the country. Various secondary data sources would be reviewed to build into the case studies for each political party in Namibia in order to develop and in-depth understanding of how ethnicity guided its formation and operations. Some of the secondary materials reviewed for data included election statistics, government reports on political parties, newspaper reviews, journal articles, and political reviews presenting details of the formation and operations of different political parties in Namibia from 2009 to date. The researcher will also seek additional details of the issue of ethnicity in the country's political landscape by accessing previous research studies on the subject.

The use of secondary data was found to be the most appropriate by the researcher since it allows significant savings in terms of time and financial resources. The suitability of the content analysis method in a phenomenon that is widely distributed is supported by Starman (2013) who points out that it leads to significant savings in terms of time since the researcher does not have to physically move to all the important locations. Using this method therefore, the researcher will be able to access all the important details addressing the subject matter by accessing the necessary sources online in government websites, news articles, and previous research studies.

3.3. Search Strategy

The use of secondary data sources requires identification of quality sources to be used in completing the study. To achieve this, the study established a comprehensive search strategy that was effective in searching for quality sources in relevant databases and other information centers (Palinkas et al. 2015). The databases used in the search for the secondary data sources included *International Idea*, *Electoral Commission of Namibia*, *Namibia's Political Parties Database*, *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)*, and *Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID)*. The keywords used in searching the databases included 'political parties', 'ethnicity in Namibia', 'elections in Namibia', 'voting patterns in Namibia', and 'political party support in Namibia'. An eligibility criterion was used to sort the secondary sources identified in order to remain with the most relevant and quality sources for the research study. The table below outlines the eligibility criterion used, which identified 10 quality sources from 250 general ones.

Table 1: *Eligibility criteria* Table 2: *Eligibility criteria*

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sources on formation of Namibian political parties	Sources on the Namibian government structure
Sources on ethnicity in political party formation	Sources on the economy and growth of Namibia
Sources on election and voting patterns in Namibia	Sources published before 2009
Sources published in 2009 to date	Sources on education and health in Namibia

(Source: Author)

The seven sources identified are listed in the Appendix section of the paper.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

The study used literature review analysis in collecting data from the quality sources identified and selected through the comprehensive search strategy. Literature review analysis is instrumental in evaluating secondary data sources, as it helps in identifying key information from each source, which is critical in building strong case studies for the research. Data presented in the Namibian elections websites presents important political party information in the country from 2009 to 2019, specifically the Electoral Commission of Namibia. The researcher will use the website to identify the areas in the country where the biggest parties garnered the most votes. This distribution will show the researcher the ethnic groups that support each particular party. Information contained in other sources will then be used to give different perspectives of why the support for the parties is distributed as shown in the website. All this information will be tabulated by the researcher thus giving the data that will be used in the data analysis stage.

3.5. Shortcomings and Challenges

While the data from the electoral website can be trusted to be accurate, there is no way for the researcher to ascertain the validity of the claims presented in news articles and other sources. For example, sources assessed to give information about the effectiveness of the government might be biased. It is likely that the research might use some biased information in the development of the case study. However, in addressing this potential shortcoming, the researcher will seek sources supporting any claims made in one source so that all information that goes to the data analysis stage is well corroborated by multiple sources. On the other hand, since it will be impossible to ascertain the validity of information that appears in only one source, the researcher will discard it. Although this approach of including only information that is corroborated will improve the validity of the research, it will introduce the risk of losing useful valid information that might have been essential in responding to the research questions.

3.6. Data Analysis

The proposed method of data analysis was the thematic analysis technique, adopted because of its effectiveness in evaluating qualitative secondary data with regard to common themes, trends, and patterns evidenced from the literature review analysis of the selected quality sources. In this regard, the thematic analysis advanced the research's application of the case study reviews, in that it helped build on specific case study areas that were instrumental in establishing the correlation between ethnicity and the formation of political parties, with a focus on the Namibian political scene. In this case, the first step of applying the thematic analysis technique in analysing the data collected included identifying special codes relating to the data, and then tracing the codes throughout the selected quality sources, building on the common

trends, patterns and themes. Table 2 below shows the thematic analysis process used and how the three main themes of the study were identified.

Table 3: *Coding process in thematic analysis*

Sn.	Phase	Procedure
1	Familiarisation	Literature review analysis of the 7 quality secondary sources identified
2	Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tribes voting as a bloc ▪ Tribes voting for a candidate from their ethnicity ▪ Ethnicity determines party choices ▪ Large ethnic groups have large voting base ▪ Communities support their respective parties ▪ Tribesmen support their own parties
3	Generating themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ethnicity determines party choices ▪ Large ethnic groups have large voting base ▪ Political parties engage their respective tribes
4	Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communities support their respective parties ▪ Tribesmen support their own parties ▪ Large tribes form stronger political parties
5	Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Voting patterns in Namibia ▪ Ethnic politics in Namibia ▪ Political parties in Namibia
6	Preparing the report	Prepared as follows

(Source: Author)

As such, the following key themes were used in analysing the data.

- Voting patterns in Namibia
- Ethnic politics in Namibia
- Political parties in Namibia

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Since there are no human participants involved in this research study, the researcher will not need to prepare any consent forms to be signed before the research can be conducted.

However, maintaining objectivity and ensuring no bias in the data analysis and reporting stage will be the most important ethical consideration in this research. In appreciation that it is likely to introduce personal biases in the case study, the researcher will maintain vigilance throughout the data analysis stage. The researcher will be able to achieve vigilance throughout the process by writing down some of the personal biases held about the political situation in Namibia. By constantly comparing the list of biases with the deductions presented at different stages of the data analysis process, the researcher will be able to ensure that objectivity is maintained. It is also expected that since the case study will present political issues that are likely to paint some individuals negatively, the researcher will refrain from mentioning people's names throughout the case study.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussions

4.1. Thematic Analysis of Data

4.1.1. Political Parties in Namibia

The study established that Namibia is a democratic republic, where the national constitution allows for multiparty representation in the two houses of government. To understand the significance of political parties in getting politicians elected requires an overview of the bicameral parliamentary system of Namibia (Melber, 2017). Namibia's legislature has two chambers (bicameral) whereby the lower chamber is the National Assembly, while the upper chamber is the National Council. The National Assembly has 104 members of parliament, whereby 96 of them are elected by voters during parliamentary elections. The president fills the remaining 8 slots by appointing his or her preferred candidates into these positions. The National Council consists of 42 representatives of the Regional councils (Bayer, 2017). There are 14 of these regions in the country, whereby each region is supposed to elect three representatives. The country holds elections in every five years, and as such, the period covered in this study stretches through 3 general elections including the 2009, 2014, and the 2019 elections.

All politicians voted as people's representatives in either the upper house or the lower house belongs to a political party. The study established that even though Namibia allows multi party representations, only one party is dominant in the country (Chigudu, 2019). This is the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), which is currently the ruling party with the highest number of representatives in both houses during the last 2019 general elections (Machiko, 2019). SWAPO was formerly an independence movement in the country before it gained its independence in 1990, and has been the governing party since. This explains why opposition parties have had little chance in making the government. The prevalence of SWAPO

in the country, and the failure of opposition parties to remove it from the country's leadership is largely attributable to the politics of ethnicity that control the elections and voting behaviours in the country, including party affiliations (Melber, 2020). In fact, some political parties, especially those in the opposition, are dominated by a single ethnic group. The ruling party is not spared in this ethnicity sectarianism given the fact that the Ovambo ethnic group is dominant in government and administration.

The SWAPO Party produced the largest number of parliamentary representatives during the 2019 general elections, whereby it sponsored 63 members to the house. The second largest party to sponsor members to the house included 16 members from the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM); while the third largest party to sponsor members to the house was the Landless People's Movement (LPM) (Keulder, 2019). Other parties that sponsored at least two members to the house included the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO), the United Democratic Front (UDF), All People's Party (APP), the Republican Party (RP), and the Namibian Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF). On the other hand, parties that sponsored at least one member to the house included the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), Christian Democratic Voice (CDV), and the South West African National Union (SWANU). However, the parties that failed to sponsor any members to the house included the National Democratic Party (NDP), the Congress of Democrats (CoD) party, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), as well as the National Patriotic Front (NPF).

The study established from the representation by different parties that ethnicity played a significant role in determining both the formation of political parties, as well as directing the voting patterns in the country. Evidently, the largest ethnic group in the country has retained control of governance and leadership in the country through the SWAPO ruling party (Melber,

Kromrey & Welz, 2017). An analysis of the ethnic demographics of Namibia established that the Ovambo tribe was the largest ethnic group in the country making up approximately 49.8% of the country's population, residing mostly in the Northern part of the country, and spread throughout different towns and urban centers nationally. As such, this explains why the party has had control of parliament and government ever since the country gained its independence in 1990 (Melber, 2020).

The Kavango tribe is the second largest ethnic group in the country, making up 9.3% of the total population, followed in third place by the Damara tribe and the Herero tribe, both contributing 7.5% of the total population. The whites make 6.4%; the Nama make 4.8%, the Caprivian make 3.7%, the San make 2.9%, while the Basters make 2.5%. Apparently, each tribe has an active political party representing its interests in national politics, established by a review of the three largest parties in Namibian parliament (Machiko, 2019). As such, this explains why the opposition has never managed to dispose the ruling SWAPO party from the country's leadership because each ethnic tribe struggles to gain political relevance, yet it lacks the numbers to form a government. However, this would probably be different if the small ethnic tribes had joined together and formed a single strong opposition party.

4.1.1.1 The SWAPO Party

The study's findings established that SWAPO Party (South West Africa People's Organisation), was formed before the independence of Namibia as a pro-independence movement, given its strategic role in pushing for the independence of Namibia, which transformed into a political party after the country become independent in 1990, sponsoring the first government, and subsequent governments thereafter (Melber, 2017). The fact that it played a strategic role in fast-tracking the independence of Namibia gave it nationwide prevalence and

support, which explains why it has been the governing party in the country since its independence, providing the three post-independence presidents and governments of Namibia (Bayer, 2017). However, despite being the largest post-independence party in the country, it is also notable that the ethnicity factor played an instrumental role in promoting the success of the party, particularly with leadership of the county, given that the Ovambo ethnic group, which is also the largest ethnic group in the country, continues to dominate the numbers and influence of the party.

Formed in April 19, 1960, SWAPO was established as a replacement of the Ovamboland People's Organisation. Initially, the Ovambo ethnic group settled in the northern part of the country was the one spearheading efforts for independence of Namibia. However, its name gave it an ethnic look, as opposed to representing the entire country (Machiko, 2019). This is what prompted leaders to rename the organisation to show that its objectives represented the interests of all Namibians. Its objective was to fight relentlessly for the freedom and genuine independence of Namibia, and translate the people's hopes and aspirations into reality. Nevertheless, the Ovambo people retained control of the organisation, including its base, its leadership, and its policy-making organs.

As such, Chigudu (2019) noted that this explains why the party has controlled over two-thirds majority in parliament from 1994 to 2019 during each general election held in the country. For instance, in the last elections held in November 2019, the party won through a popular vote 65.5% of the total votes, which enabled it to secure 63 out of the 104 seats in the National Assembly (Keulder, 2019). Similarly, the party also has control of the National Council, holding 40 out of the 42 seats. As mentioned above, all post-independence presidents and governments of Namibia were formed by SWAPO as the ruling party.

From this perspective, the study established that ethnicity played a strategic role in the formation and operations of the SWAPO party, whereby its affiliation to the largest ethnic group in the country, the Ovambo tribe, enabled it to for subsequent governments in the country (Melber, 2020). In the same regard, judging from the ethnic voting patterns witnessed in the country over the past three elections, it is highly unlikely that another political party would unseat SWAPO from power, given that the ethnic group that supports it is also the largest in the country, which means that it also has the largest numbers of registered voters. Machiko (2019) stated that this scenario is both good and bad for the country, good in the sense that one party is assured of controlling the government at all times, but bad, in case the government formed by the party falls short of the people's expectations, and instead uses its influence to extend unholy rule over the country.

4.1.1.2 The Popular Democratic Movement (PDM)

The study identified the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) as the second largest political party in Namibia after the SWAPO ruling party, and as such, the official opposition party in the country. The size of the party is attributable to the different small parties that were dissolved to form it, giving it some little strength and significance against the ruling party. Initially, PDM was established in 1977 following the transition of Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) to PDM, as different parties agreed to amalgamate and form one single strong party (Melber, Kromrey and Welz, 2017). Apparently, this was a good move to eliminate the influence of ethnic politics in the country, but it appears that its efforts were not as successful, given the fact that the independent political parties dissolved to form it still held onto their respective ethnic balance. Incidentally, the size of the PDM party is considerably large compared to other smaller political parties in the country, and as such, this explains its capability to form

the official opposition party in the country, a position it has held for years. In fact, the PDM party is currently the official opposition party in Namibia after emerging the second best in sponsoring the second highest number of political representatives in the National Assembly during the 2019 general elections. PDM party formed a coalition with the United Democratic Front, where collectively, they sponsored 16 politicians to the National Assembly and 2 politicians to the Namibian National Council.

According to Machiko (2019), various affiliate political parties were dissolved to form the DTA, which eventually transformed into PDM to become the largest and strongest opposition party in Namibia. These parties included NDP (National Democratic Party), NDUP (National Democratic Unity Party), NDTP (Namibia Democratic Turnhalle Party), CDP (Christian Democratic Party), BA (Bushman Alliance), RDTAP (Rehoboth DTA Party), NUDO (National Unity Democratic Organisation), SWAP-DUF (South West Africa People's Democratic United Front), SWALP (South West African Labor Party), and TAP (Tswana Alliance Party). Notably, each of these parties underscored democracy as their primary pillars but did not practice democracy in reality (Melber, 2017). For starters, the fact that there were already a handful of political parties operating in the country during its pre-independence era is an indication of the lack of unity and democracy in Namibia, given that political leaders who felt their views were not properly represented in their present parties opted out and formed their own opposition parties, courting on the un-relentless support from their ethnic tribes to gain national relevance.

As such, irrespective of the fact that PDM appears to have a national look in its formation and representation, its chances of taking control of the government from SWAPO are still limited, given that it has not managed to successfully unite the opposition against the ruling party. Melber (2020) noted that one effective strategy of achieving this would be through uniting

all the other minority ethnic tribes under one single and strong party with a national appeal that would enable it to successfully dethrone the ruling party from power. However, this still remains a big challenge, given the ethnic voting patterns of the electorate.

4.1.1.3 The Landless People's Movement (LPM)

The study established that the Landless People's Movement (LPM) was the third largest political party in Namibia, after the ruling SWAPO Party and the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) party. Bayer (2017) noted that the LPM party was also among the youngest parties in the country, having been formed in 2016 and officially registered in 2018 in preparation to participating in the 2019 general elections, where it filed several candidates for different elective posts in the country. As such, during the 2019 general elections, the party managed to secure 4 seats in the National Assembly, and none in the National Council, making it the second largest opposition party in the country by virtue of political representation. The leadership of the party is guided by Bernadus Swartbooi, the former Deputy Minister of Lands and Resettlement, who is the Party President and the Chief Change Campaigner. The deputy leader of the party is Henry Seibeb.

Bernadus Swartbooi formed the LPM in 2016 after he was fired from his ministerial post by President Hage Geingob in December 2016. The PDM Party was formed as a splinter party from the ruling SWAPO Party, after the deputy minister fell out with his former boss, making it a split party of the ruling party, hence taking with it some of its faithful, especially those disgruntled by its leadership (Bayer, 2017). As such, this explains why the party, despite being one of the youngest parties in the country, is still among the strongest opposition parties in the country, considering the large number of political parties in the country, some formed even before the country's independence. In addition, the party also has a student wing, which helps

with its numbers and popularity in the country, known as the LPM Student Command. The values and ideologies that the party holds also promotes its popularity in the country, considering its key ideologies of socialism, land reform, environmentalism, and agrarian reform.

Chigudu (2019) noted that the party leader, Swatbooi played a strategic role in promoting the popularity of the party across the country, considering the fact that he was a vocal advocate of land restitution and restorative justice for landless Namibians who were dispossessed of their land including indigenous communities. In this regard, LPM is not only popular among the landless communities in the country, but also popular among the communities that felt they were not fully represented in the SWAPO party. This is considering the fact that even though SWAPO party projected a nationwide democratic image, it was still mainly controlled by the Ovambo tribe. Kuelder (2019) added that the party also favours LGBT rights and it also plans on addressing the issues of abortion and marijuana legalisation.

4.1.2. Voting Patterns in Namibia

From the above analysis of the three largest political parties in Namibia, it is evident that the voting patterns in the country were largely influenced by the ethnicity. For instance, the ruling party has enjoyed continuous success in national politics because of the undivided support it has from the Ovambo ethnic group, which is the largest ethnic group in the country, making up approximately 49% of the total population of Namibia. In this regard, Bayer (2017) stated that given the ethnic voting practices in Namibia, it was expected that the Ovambo tribe voted as a bloc for candidates running for political seats on the ruling SWAPO party. As a result, this made it difficult for other political parties to secure elective posts in the two houses, the National Assembly and the National Council, as their respective communities lacked the very important numbers that were required for winning a general election in Namibia.

The fact that there is no strong opposition in the country further confirms the strong influence of ethnicity in the formation and choice of political parties in Namibia. Apparently, the other smaller political parties in the country, over 20 in number, have been unsuccessful in wrestling the party's leadership away from the Ovambo tribe and the ruling SWAPO party because they lack the numbers required to sway the popular majority vote in their favour (Chigudu, 2019). In the same regard, since each party pursues personal interests, as opposed to the interests of democracy, it is impossible for the small parties to join together and form a stronger and more influential political party that represents the interests of the entire country. Melber (2017) noted that such outfits failed from the onset, evidenced by the failure by Popular Democratic Movement to present a strong opposition to the ruling SWAPO party, despite the amalgamation of different political parties under its wing. This is evident from the 16 seats against 64 seats that PDM managed to secure in the National Assembly against SWAPO party; a scene that also played out in the National Council as PDM only managed to secure 2 out of the possible 42 seats.

Melber (2020) noted that by far, the fastest rising political party in the country is the Landless Peoples Movement (LPM) given its formidable success in the last general elections, where it came out as the third largest party in the country by sponsoring 4 legislators to the National Assembly. However, the study noted that the success of the party was not informed by its formation, but rather by the fact that it was a splinter party of the ruling SWAPO party, meaning that most of its members were primarily SWAPO's diehards. In this regard, it is appropriate to state the fact that majority of its members are also from the majority Ovambo tribe, as opposed to being representative of the larger Namibian community. As such, Kuelder (2019) established that the outfit still confirms the fact that ethnicity has a significant impact on

the political party choice within the Namibian setting, given the preference by different ethnic communities to vote in their own tribesmen as opposed to voting in candidates by virtue of their political ideas and suitability to occupy a public office.

4.1.3. Ethnic Politics in Namibia

The two themes analysed above build into the third theme of the study, which confirms the fact that there is a strong prevalence of ethnic politics in Namibia, evidenced by the formation of different political parties, and the voting patterns by the Namibian electorate during general elections. Melber, Kromrey and Welz (2017) established that since most political parties in Namibia were formed on ethnic grounds, then the choice of political parties was also guided by ethnic roots, a fact that also played out in the electioneering period, where communities were synonymous for voting as a bloc for a political candidate from their tribe, as opposed to voting for the best political candidate that would bring about the desired reforms and development in the country. Keulder (2019) added that due to the tendency to vote along ethnic lines in Namibia, it was noted that a good political candidate, who might be the most deserving and qualified for a particular public office such as the Presidency is most likely to fail miserably in his or her attempt to get into office because most of the voter would not vote for him simply because he or she is not from their tribe. As such, Machiko (2019) noted that the case is even worse for the political candidate should it turn out that his or she is running on a political party that does not have a strong ethnic background backing its political ambitions, such as the Ovambo tribe's undivided support for the SWAPO party.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

The research study examined the impact of ethnicity on the choice of political parties among the electorate and politicians in Namibia. The concept of the research study builds around the ideology of democracy and how it is practiced in an African setting. As such, the research study focused on Namibia, an African country located in the southern part of the continent, which gained its independence in 1990 to become a sovereign democratic republic. Soon after, Namibia began practicing its self-rule, through the democratic election of its political representatives into the two legislative houses in the country, the National Assembly and the National Council.

Therefore, by virtue of holding free and fair general elections every five years, it would be expected that Namibia is a fully democratic republic, whereby the people have absolute power in the country, exercised indirectly through their vote, where they choose different political representatives to represent them in different public offices. However, the study established that the context of democracy in Namibia was not entirely democratic, judging from the fact that it was significantly influenced by other external factors, primarily ethnicity, which in turn compromised the standards of democracy observed in the country, as well as the fruits of democracy enjoyed by its people. These findings were consistent with Melber (2020) findings, who established that in a democratic setting, it would be expected that anyone in the country held an equal chance of being elected into any political office in the country as long as he or she had the right qualifications in terms of merit and public service.

An illustrative example of this is the American democratic setting, where President Barrack Obama became the 44th President of the United States, and the first Black president in the history of the country. Considering the fact that the country is coming from a background of

years of slavery, in that blacks were taken to the United States as slaves with no rights and freedoms, including human rights, as they were treated as slaves of their White masters, it was unthinkable and a descendant of the minority black slaves generation would come to lead and rule over the White majority in the country. In this regard, for a black person to rise the social ranks and become the most powerful person in the country simply shows the heights of democracy achieved in the United States.

However, the case is completely different in the African setting, whereby the prospects of democracy are always stifled by other non-related factors, which propagate divisions and disunity in the political arena. In most cases, African countries that purport to be democratic in their political settings rarely observe or practice the democracy they preach, given as the democracy is strangled by a diverse range of factors, including ethnicity, like in the case of Namibia, corruption, deep state, and financial resources, among many others. These findings were consistent with Machiko (2019) findings, who established that in the case of Namibia, ethnicity is the biggest ‘thorn in the flesh’ of democracy in the country, whereby ethnic backgrounds of the political contestants have a significant impact on whether or not they successfully contest for public political offices in the country.

In addition, the success of politicians in the country is also limited to the political party in which they run for an elective post, given that most ethnic communities in the country vote as a bloc for the same candidate in the community’s political party. These findings are consistent with Bayer (2017), who established that this also means that voters in Namibia are rarely swayed by merit, qualifications, and potential of individual politicians who contest for different elective public positions in the country, but rather by the ethnic background of the contestants, and their respective political parties. As a result, the country sometimes ends up electing wrong leaders

simply because they voted on the ‘right’ political party, as opposed to voting in the right leaders because they voted on the ‘wrong’ political party or hailed from a minority ethnic community.

The basis of most political parties in Namibia was the ethnic backgrounds of the political leaders who reached the decision to form the political party. In fact, a majority of these political parties were formed from a single tribe in the country, which controlled the leadership of the party, before drumming up support for countrywide representation. These findings were consistent with Chigudu (2019), who established that the ruling SWAPO party, which is primarily an Ovambo tribe political outfit, has been the ruling party in the country since independence, is formed by the largest tribe in Namibia and not only controls the party by virtue of party leadership and organisation, but the tribe also controls the voting patterns and political success of the party. As such, this means that without the Ovambo tribe, the SWAPO party would not enjoy the political success that it has been enjoying over the years, especially after the country gained independence in 1990, as it has been the ruling party and formed each successive government that was elected into office ever since. In addition, the tribe also produced all the successive presidents that led the country, including most, if not all, of the plum government jobs in the country by virtue of its people and tribesmen having a strong voting power over other ethnic groups in the country.

The prevalence of ethnicity in the political setting of Namibia is equally evident from the other political parties in the country, including the smaller political outfits, such as the PDM party and the LPM party, both of which apparently enjoy nationwide support, but till have been unable to attain the political leadership that they desire. On the contrary, these parties have been forced to exist as opposition parties in the country, given that they are unable to wrestle the leadership of the country from the ruling SWAPO party as they cannot marshal enough votes

from the Namibian electorate to form the government. These findings were consistent with Melber, Kromrey and Welz (2017) who noted that to make matters worse, the smaller political parties in the country are also primarily ethnic in nature, in that they also fight individually for their interests, as opposed to working collectively, which makes it even harder for any political party in the country to imagine toppling the ruling SWAPO party from the helm of power in Namibia.

In this regard, it is evident that the findings of the research study answered the research question, as to how ethnicity impacts the choice of political parties in Namibia. The study established that much as Namibia was a democratic republic, it was not fully democratic, given the fact that the prospects of democracy in the country were stifled by the significant impact of ethnicity in the political choices made in the country. These findings were consistent with Melber (2020) who noted that not only were political parties in the country formed on the basis of ethnic tribes, but the voters also voted based on their respective ethnic blocs. As such, the success of a politician in being elected into an elective post in government was determined by his or her ethnic background, which also determined the strength of his or her political party in forming a government, as opposed to his or her merits, qualifications, and expertise as the right candidate worthy of filling the public office. These findings were consistent with Machiko (2019) who stated that merit and qualifications of the political candidates did not have a significant influence on the political choices made in the country, given that most choices were made based on ethnic lines and affiliations.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the findings of the study indicate the fact that ethnicity plays a significant role in the political choices made in the country, especially with regard to the formation of political parties, as well as the choice of political parties in the country. As such, these conclusions answered the research question identified in the study, which sought to establish how ethnicity impacts the choice of political parties in Namibia. The study's findings established that most political parties, except for one or two, were primarily based on ethnic backgrounds as the basis of their support, in that without the votes from their respective tribes, they would not have any presence in government. This is evident from the case of the SWAPO party which it draws its strong support from the Ovambo tribe in Namibia, which also doubles up as the largest tribe in the country with nearly 50% of the total population.

As such, the study established that the SWAPO party has enjoyed its success as the ruling party in Namibia ever since the country gained its independence because of the strong backing it draws from the Ovambo ethnic tribesmen. This is evident from the voting patterns in the country, where the study noted that most ethnic communities voted as a bloc for a political candidate running for a political seat on their community's political party, as opposed to voting for a political candidate because of his or her perceived merit and qualification for the job. Incidentally, the amalgamation of different political parties in the country to form the PDM party also failed to raise enough votes to change the political landscape in the country, given as the voters at the grass root levels voted as bloc in favour of the candidate running on their community's political party, as opposed to the virtues and ideas of the politician.

In this regard, it is evident that the concept of ethnicity has a significant impact on the political choices made in the country, subsequently confirming the research hypothesis established for the study and answering the research question as well.

5.2. Recommendations

The findings of the study established that even though Namibia was a democratic republic, democracy was in serious trial in the country, having been stifled by the prevalence of ethnicity in the political landscape of the country. In this regard, it is recommended that the politicians in the country start educating the public, especially the minority groups in the grassroots, about the necessity to shift from ethnic politics, and instead embrace political idealism as the benchmark of their political choices and decisions, including voting patterns, formation of political parties, and choice of political parties.

To achieve this, it is recommended for Namibian politicians to borrow a leaf from some of the established democracies in the world like the United Kingdom and the United States. Each country has two large political parties, which are formed based on the ideals that they uphold as opposed to the ethnic background from which they were formed. For instance, the two leading parties in the UK include the Conservative Party, which upholds conservative political ideals, and the Labour Party, which upholds loyalist political ideals. As such, when UK voters go the ballot, they make their political choices based on the ideals upheld by each party, as opposed to their ethnic backgrounds, which in turn affords any prospective political candidate from being successfully elected as the Prime Minister in the country. Similarly, the United States also has two major political outfits, the Republicans, and the Democrats, guided by their respective ideals.

In this regard, it is noted that if Namibia were to adopt this approach in its voting patterns, then it would manage to successfully transform the current situation whereby ethnic politics govern the political decisions made in the country. In addition, it would be recommended that the smaller political outfits in the country to dissolve and amalgamate in order to form one single large party that is much stronger and enjoys nationwide support, which might enable it to bring about political transformations in the country, from ethnic voting patterns and political parties, to idealism backgrounds.

5.3. Future Topics

Based on the findings in this study, a future research topic that could be pursued would be *‘how to introduce and integrate idealism politics in Namibia with regard to political party formation, political party choices, and voting patterns in the country’*.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of Secondary Sources Used

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Appendix 2: Thematic Coding Process

Table 1: *Coding qualitative data*

Secondary Source (journal articles)	Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ovambo tribe voted as a bloc ▪ Ovambo tribesmen voted for a common candidate in SWAPO party ▪ The leadership and membership of SWAPO party is mainly Ovambo ▪ The Ovambo tribe has produced most of the presidents in Namibia ▪ Political parties were formed along ethnic lines to gain grassroots support ▪ Political leaders turned to their tribesmen for support during elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tribes voting as a bloc ▪ Tribes voting for a candidate from their ethnicity ▪ Ethnicity determines party choices ▪ Large ethnic groups have large voting base ▪ Communities support their respective parties ▪ Tribesmen support their own parties

Table 2: *Turning codes into themes*

Codes	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tribes voting as a bloc ▪ Tribes voting for a candidate from their ethnicity 	Voting patterns in Namibia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ethnicity determines party choices 	Ethnic politics in Namibia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large ethnic groups have large voting base ▪ Communities support their respective parties 	Political parties in Namibia

- Tribesmen support their own parties