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YOU VOTED: NOW WHAT? STAYING ENGAGED IN GOVERNMENT AFTER AN ELECTION

Last week, 609 013 Namibians voted in the Regional Councils Election and 272 942 Namibians voted in the Local Authorities Election.

The voter turnout for the Regional Councils Election was 40.7% and the turnout for the Local Authorities Election was 36.29%. According to a recent article in the Namibian, voter turnout for the 2020 Regional Council Election was 38.36% and turnout for the 2020 Local Authority Election was 43.17%. These numbers are in contrast with a relatively high turnout of 76.05% in the 2024 Presidential Election.

The majority of votes in the Regional Council Election were cast for SWAPO at 63.35%, followed by the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) at 12.3%, and Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) at 5.2%; other parties and independent candidates received smaller percentages of the vote.

In the Local Authority Election, 52.4% of votes were cast for SWAPO, 15.01% of votes were cast for IPC, and 5.85% of votes were cast for the Landless People's Movement (LPM); other parties and independent candidates received smaller percentages of the vote.

Unless otherwise specified, the above statistics on election results and turnout are attributed to the Electoral Commission of Namibia's (ECN) website.

The newly elected representatives will serve for the next five years, until the next Regional Councils and Local Authorities election takes place in 2030. If you are still unsure about the results of your local election, you can find specific results for your local authority or region on the ECN website.

Now that you've voted, is there anything else you can do to make your voice heard in government? Yes—voting in an election is just the first step in participating in a democracy. As a private citizen, you can have a significant impact on how your newly elected government runs and operates beyond voting. Citizens have the right to hold newly elected leaders accountable for the promises made during election time.

Whether or not you cast your vote for the individual that ultimately won the election, your elected representative should work to serve all their constituents. Your voice and participation are key to ensuring this happens.

How can you get involved in your local government?

1. Participate in official government processes

The first way you can stay involved with your local council after elections is by attending official meetings held by your regional or local authority's council. These council meetings are generally open to the public and the time and location of the meetings should be publicised in advance by the council through traditional media sources, like newspapers and radio, or on social media platforms, like Facebook.

Attending these council meetings is one way to ensure more transparency between elected officials and the communities. If you feel like your council is not addressing an important issue, you can request the council to hold a public meeting on any topic related to public interest. If the council does not grant this request, you can get signatures from 10% of the eligible voters in your local authority or region and then it will be mandatory for the council to hold a meeting on the issue of concern.

2. Make your voice heard through advocacy campaigns

Another way that you can make your voice heard is through the media or by organising a protest or delivering a petition. Many newspapers offer the option for individuals to contribute an opinion editorial, or "op-ed." If there is an important issue in your community that you believe is under-recognised, you can write an "op-ed" to raise awareness and call for action. You can also organise a petition. A petition is a collection of signatures from impacted parties calling for a certain action.

Regional councils and local authorities have a mandate to deal with social demands such as access to water and sanitation, road structure, and a clean environment. If you believe that your local authority council should address something, like putting resources towards improving sanitation services, you can collect signatures from your community to show your representative that there is public support for that action. Another way to make your opinion heard about an issue of public interest is to hold a protest. Any individual can hold a protest if you follow the processes outlined in the Public Gatherings Proclamation Act (available on the LAC website) which includes steps like notifying the police about the details of your protest three days in advance. You can access laws on the Legal Assistance Website under Annotated Statutes.

Our constitution specifically protects the right to public participation in politics and governance. Article 17 states that all citizens of Namibia have the right to be involved in peaceful political activities. Article 21 specifies fundamental freedoms, which include freedom of speech and freedom of assembly—even if your speech is critical of the government.

3. Keep track of your representative's campaign promises

There are five years in between each Regional Council and Local Authority Election. It is important to pay attention to your representative's activities and engagement in your community across all five years. Remember that this official works to serve you and your community and they should be engaged for the entire time they are in office—not just when an election is approaching.

4. Know the law and professional standards for government employees and elected officials

Namibian law applies equally to everyone - no matter where you live, who you are, or what your job is - even if you are a government official. Article 18 of the Namibian Constitution states that all government officials must follow the laws.

Namibia has a specific law in place that prohibits corrupt practices by government officials. Corruption can refer to someone taking advantage of government affiliation to enrich themselves personally. If you believe that your elected representative is engaging in corrupt practices, you can report your suspicion to the Anti-Corruption Commission. If your complaint is filed in good faith, the Commission can protect your identity. A full list of activities that qualify as corruption are listed in the Anti-Corruption Act which is available on the LAC website.

All of the methods listed above are ways that you can continue to impact your government as a private citizen. Staying actively engaged with government outside of elections strengthens our democracy and is a patriotic way to give to your communities. Make sure your vote was not pointless by holding elected officials accountable and to demand change.

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