


4 NAMIBIAN STUDENTS AND POLITICS

Firstly, it must be noted that very little research has been done on Namibian students' political attitudes, opinions and views. What has been published often deal with organised student activity, and therefore, focus on the institutional level of student politics (see Mbuende 1995, and Maseko 1995). *Secondly*, students have rarely been made the central focus of analysis. Instead, most analysts⁸ preferred to include them, with a plethora of other institutions, in somewhat general discussions of liberation politics (see for example, Mbunde 1995; Leys and Saul 1995; and Katjavivi 1988). *Thirdly*, all discussions with reference to students have a historical focus.⁹ They work, almost exclusively, with a pre-independence time frame.

In many respects the current student body consists of the first post-liberation generation. Almost 50% of our sample population was born between 1976 and 1980, which is shortly before or during the time that petty-apartheid was abolished in Namibia and a mere decade or so before Independence. Given the fact that they were teenagers when independence was obtained, one can assume that institutionalised racism and organised resistance as agents of political socialisation did not capture this generation.¹⁰

⁸ The one exception is Maseko (1995).

⁹ As far as I know only Heribert Weiland of the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute in Freiburg, Germany conducted survey work among students around the time of independence. These results have not been published.

¹⁰ When teaching, one is often struck by younger students' lack of knowledge about the history of apartheid and liberation. One constantly has to remind oneself that these students did not have to carry 'pass books', use 'separate amenities' or marry partners from their own racial group. Furthermore, they were never denied the vote or had their political organisations banned and their leaders detained. Instead, they experienced the 'fruits of liberation': freedom and basic human rights.

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

Hence, they were neither 'stooges' nor 'brave warriors' and compared to previous generations they grew up 'uncontaminated' by colonial politics.

Shortly after Independence, organised student politics arrived at a crossroads. Gone were the enemy, and the surety of identity and orientation. Mbuende (1995:475) captures the identity orientation position of the pre-Independence student movement well when he states

[b]y preaching Black Consciousness, the student movement managed to bridge the gap between different ethnic groups. In this respect, they were more successful than the national liberation movements. The student movement meant a lot to SWAPO in this regard as those whom it converted to forging political alliance across ethnicity found SWAPO to be their natural political home. The student movement broadened SWAPO's recruiting base geographically and ethnically. **The significance of the student movement thus lay in the creation of a new social consciousness and in strengthening SWAPO** (emphasis added).

The leading student organisation of the time, NANSO¹¹ formally affiliated to SWAPO in 1989 for two reasons: to ensure electoral victory to SWAPO and to steer the political dispensation in the direction of party socialist state (Maseko 1995:127). Tensions in the alliance appeared soon after Independence when it became clear that the second of these goals was not going to be realised. Tensions increased further when it became clear that SWAPO was not going to afford NANSO the role it hoped for in post-Independence politics. Disaffiliation took place in 1991 and the need for the student movement to re-consider itself, both in terms of identity and orientation, was duly acknowledged. One student leader was adamant about this:

... the decision to disaffiliate [was] a logical response to new political realities and contradictions; the strategic goal is the challenge for control of education by democratic structures to make [it responds] to the needs of Namibia and its people (Vincent Likoro quoted by Maseko 1995:127).

Within the student movement fragmentation occurred with the formation of NASEM¹² and NACOS¹³, and the split in NANSO (affiliated and disaffiliated). Subsequently, after Independence, the profile of organised student politics changed, and the level of prominence declined from its pre-Independence days.

We believe that individual level data might provide some clues to future direction, not only as far as organised student politics are concerned, but also with respect to the

¹¹ Namibian National Students' Organisation was founded in 1984.

¹² Namibian Student Education Movement

¹³ Namibian Council of Students

polity in its totality. In this manner we may be able to gauge the possible outcomes of this process of re-orientation.

4.1 Political Activity and Participation

Some of the authors cited earlier hold that African students are politically more active and aware than the 'ordinary' members of their societies. However, we found little evidence to support this proposition with respect to Namibian students. In fact, it seems as if apathy is the dominant feature.¹⁴

Hanna (1970:424) points to possible links between the level of study and active involvement in politics and states that

[t]here is reason to believe, therefore, that the longer a student is at the university, the more active he will become. There are, however, countervailing factors. First, the longer a student participates in higher education, the less a 'free-floating' intellectual he is and the more he tends to become a chemist, a teacher, or the like. Second, the average quality of students changes at each succeeding educational level as the poorer and less interested students drop out. Thus, after two or three years the better and more professionally oriented students tend to remain. Third, the better and professionally committed students are unlikely to devote time both to education and politics.

Activity and participation were measured through a number of variables: voting; discussing politics with friends family and others; influencing others, providing advice to others; participating in the activities of political parties and other institutions with political goals; writing letters to the press; talking to policy makers and party officials; and, attending political meetings and rallies. These activities were clustered into four broad categories: voting; discussing politics; political activity; and, consulting the media for political information.

4.1.1 Voting

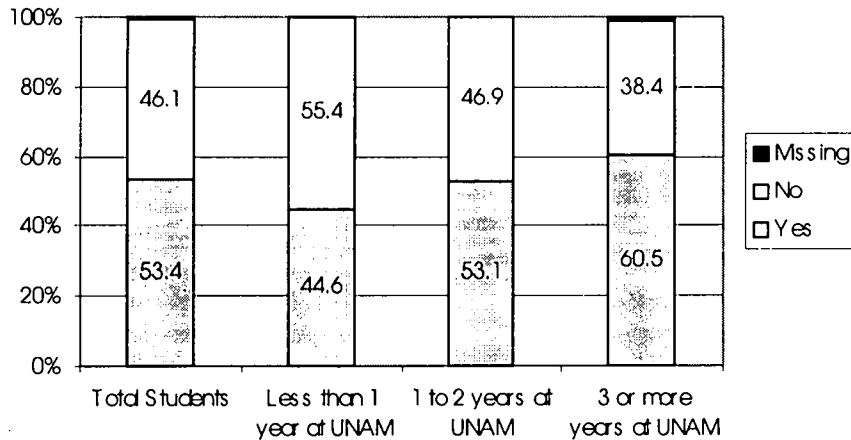
The majority of UNAM students surveyed have voted since Independence. However, those who have done so are not many more than those who have not voted. Another feature here is that very few students, only 21.8%, are enlisted members of a political party. Overall, respondents are strong supporters of the ruling party, with high levels of

¹⁴ Interpreting 'neutral' views is generally problematic. It is often considered to represent apathy. Apathy in the context of political development can be positive or negative depending on the angle of analysis and the nature of the polity. It can be positive when it contributes to the consolidation of a democratic dispensation, i.e. where the nature of the regime is agreed upon and is no longer contested. In the context of transitional politics where a democratic outcome is by no means a certainty, apathy can be negative. Here it is fit to regard 'neutral' views as 'not-positive'.

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

loyalty towards it. A further breakdown of the data suggests that more senior students are more inclined to vote than are their juniors.

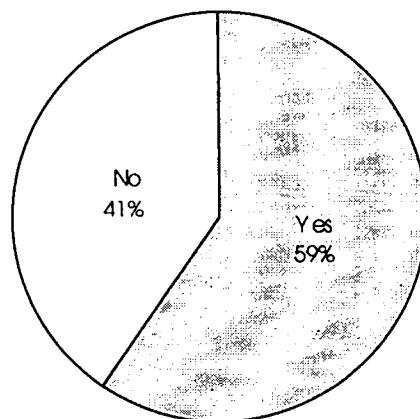
Figure 1. Percent UNAM Students who have Voted since 1990 by Number of Years at UNAM (n = 564)



There is, however, one note of caution. It is possible that the first category of respondents were simply too young to vote at the time of the previous elections (1994).

We wanted to know from respondents who have not voted before (since 1990), whether or not they would be prepared to vote in the next election. The aim here was to get some idea whether or not these respondents are to join, or remain outside of, the electoral system. This would also allow us to assess future potential for political participation through the vote.

Figure 2. Percent UNAM Students who have Not Voted, but will Vote in the Next Election (n = 385)



Although the majority indicated willingness to vote, the remainder (40.5%) is substantial and can therefore not be ignored. There are two broad yet inter-related

explanations for this trend. The first is apathy or cynicism and the second disillusionment. It is our view, given the general high levels of apathy indicated throughout the entire data set, that the former might be carrying higher explanatory value. We cannot rule out disillusionment entirely however. Where abstinence from the vote is due to disillusionment, it is likely that the disillusionment set in even before the respondents entered the political system as voters (given the average age of the respondents).

Here too, the junior students are more likely than senior students abstain from voting. Of those within the first year of study 31% indicated that they would not vote in the next election; of those with 1 to 2 years of study, 28% gave the same response; whilst 24.9% of those with 3 to 4 years of study expressed an intention of not voting.

Students seem divided as to how much their votes matter or impact on the quality of government. What is also of concern is the large proportion of students that are not sure whether or not their votes would or could make a difference. Almost 22% felt that their votes would not make things better while slightly more, almost 34%, felt that their votes could make things better. The majority, almost 42%, preferred an 'in between' option. These are the ones that are uncertain about the impact of their vote. There is no biographical variable that shows a significant impact on voter efficacy.

4.1.2 Discussing Politics

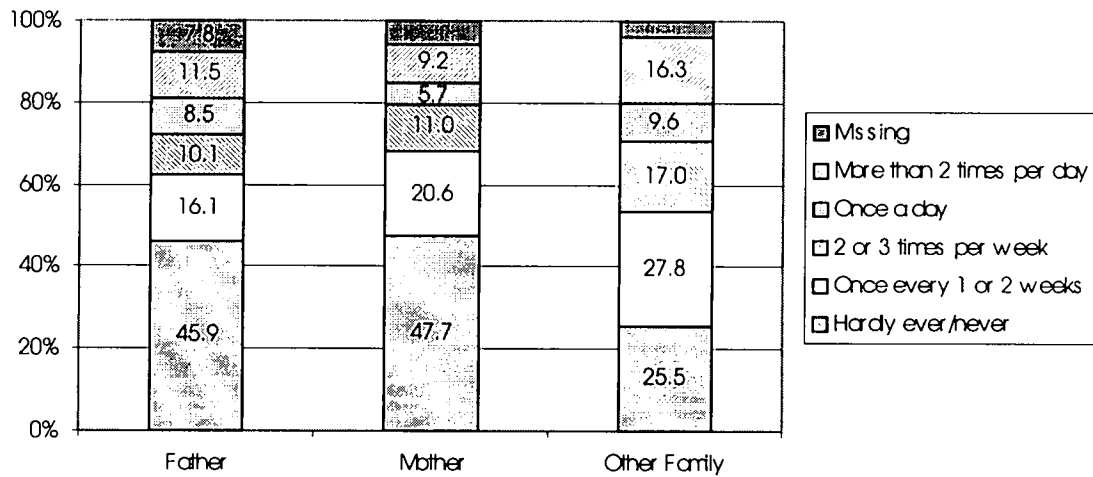
Overall the majority of students seldom get involved in political discussions. We have identified a number of possible groups and individuals with which discussions could be held, parents, family, classmates, fellow students, acquaintances, and public and party officials. Furthermore, we distinguished between 'sympathetic discussants' (those with similar views) and 'unsympathetic discussants' (those with conflicting or dissimilar views) to assess not only the frequency and targets of discussions, but also to assess the willingness to be exposed through discussion to supporters/proponents of opposing groups/views/parties.

With regard to the frequency of political discussions we found it to be low. It is lowest for family and highest for friends and classmates who share similar views.

The data suggest firstly, that the majority of students do not discuss politics with their family on a regular basis. Where such discussions take place frequently, most prefer to do so with family members other than their parents. It seems as if students have no strong preference for either father or mother when it comes to discussing politics. When discussing politics with other students (classmates or not) students tend to favour those with political views similar to their own.

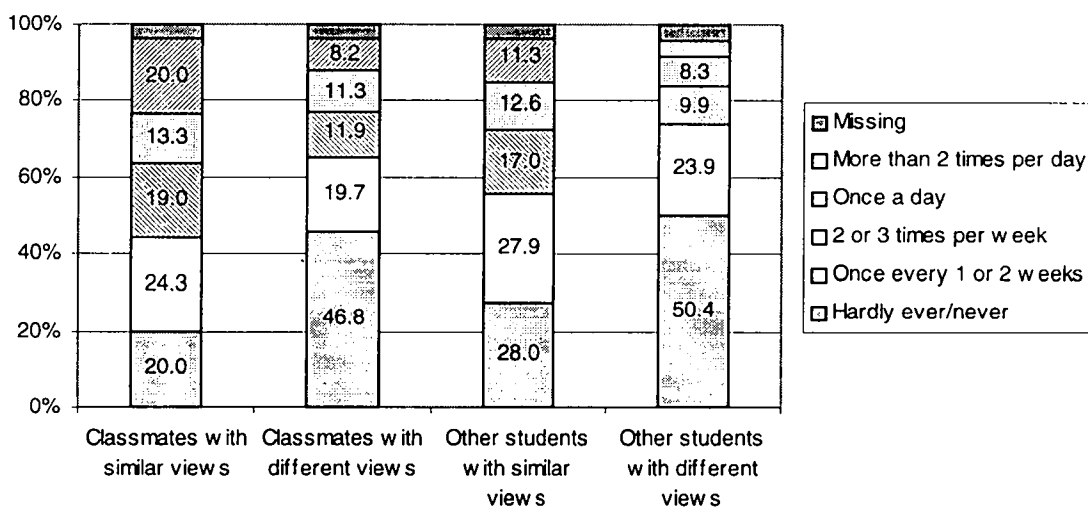
Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

Figure 3. Frequency that UNAM Students have Political Discussions with Family Members (n = 564)



Discussions with classmates with similar views are most frequent while discussions with other students with dissimilar views are least frequent. There are two possible explanations for this trend. Firstly, the fact that they share the same class, and hence that they get to see each other on a regular basis, might make it easier to meet for discussions (and perhaps they trust classmates more). Secondly, discussing politics with others that hold different views than ones own might create conflict. Hence, to avoid conflict, students avoid discussing politics with those who disagree with them.

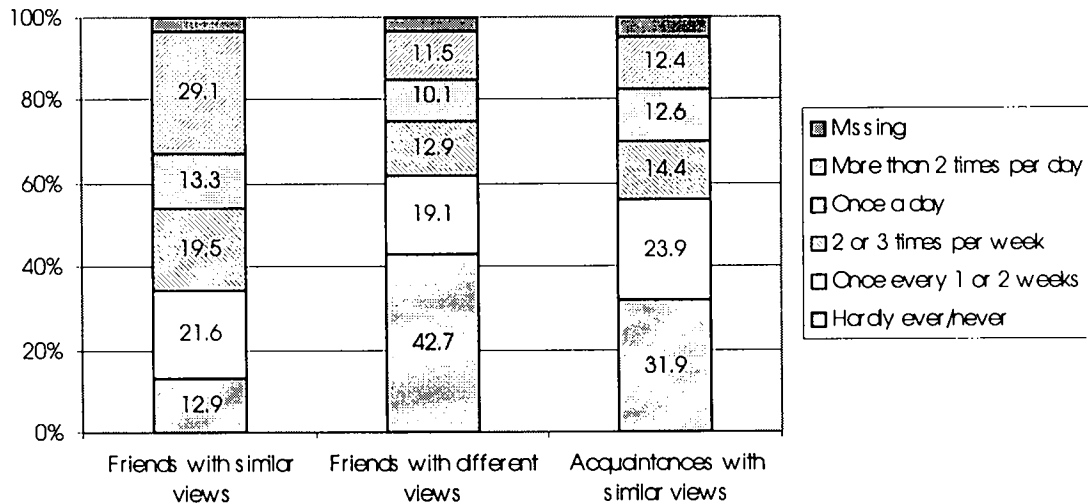
Figure 4. Frequency that UNAM Students have Political Discussions with Fellow Students (n = 564)



The third group of discussants is friends and acquaintances. One can assume that these individuals are located, in emotional proximity, somewhere between the family and

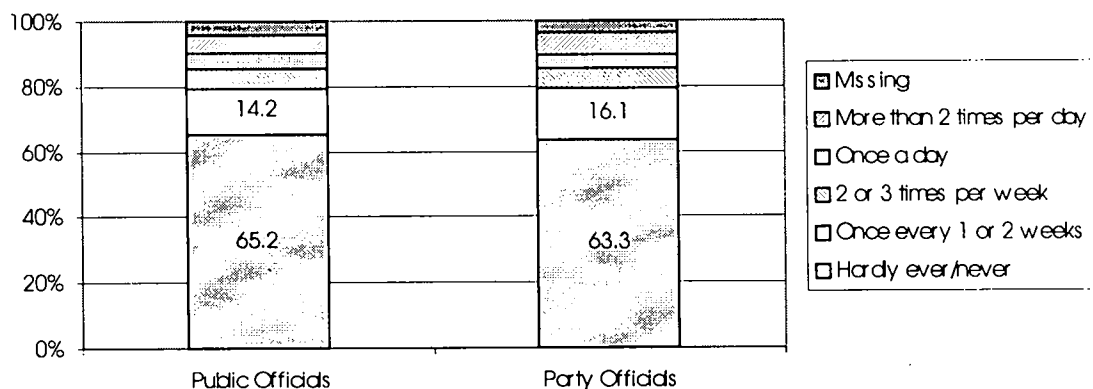
fellow students. It would therefore be interesting to compare (at a secondary level) the differences between the four broad clusters of potential discussants.

Figure 5. Frequency that UNAM Students have Political Discussions with Friends and Acquaintances (n = 564)



The fourth cluster of potential discussants can be loosely defined as ‘specialists’ or at least ‘informed discussants.’ They are the career politicians and public officials, the practitioners. Due to the nature of their work and their positions in society, the costs individuals incur in consulting them are usually higher than with the other clusters. They are also further removed, emotionally, from the individual (hence, the relationship is less personal) and the context in which contact with them is established is different than with the other clusters. One should therefore expect contact with them to be less frequent than with the others. This is confirmed by our recorded responses, interaction is very low.

Figure 6. Frequency that UNAM Students have Political Discussions with Public Officials and Party Officials (n = 564)



Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

This suggests that students are ever so slightly more inclined to have discussions with party officials than with public officials. The difference is however, so small, it is insignificant.

Overall, the following conclusions can be drawn from the trend recorded above. Firstly, friends and classmates are most frequent partners in political discussions. Family and acquaintances, and then parents, public and party officials follow behind friends and classmates. The second finding is that students tend to prefer discussing politics with those who hold views similar views to their own. Such discussions would serve the purpose of reinforcing existing views. Chances are slim that these views would be challenged on a regular basis. Discussing politics on campus would thus contribute little towards change in political views. Furthermore, unlike Hanna (1970:424), we found no support for the proposition that 'old-timers' are more frequent discussants of politics.

4.1.3 Political Activity

We have compiled a list of common political activities that includes: influencing the views of others; being asked for advice on matters political; activity in political parties; activity in organisations other than parties with political goals; writing letters to the print media; putting views to politicians; and, attending meeting and gatherings where political issues are discussed. Some of these are activities that impose relatively little personal costs whilst others are more costly.¹⁵ Among those less costly are influencing the views of others (this can happen during any conversation at any type of meeting) and being asked for advice (sometimes this could entail no more than expressing an opinion or answering a question).

Table 3. Relative Cost by Activity

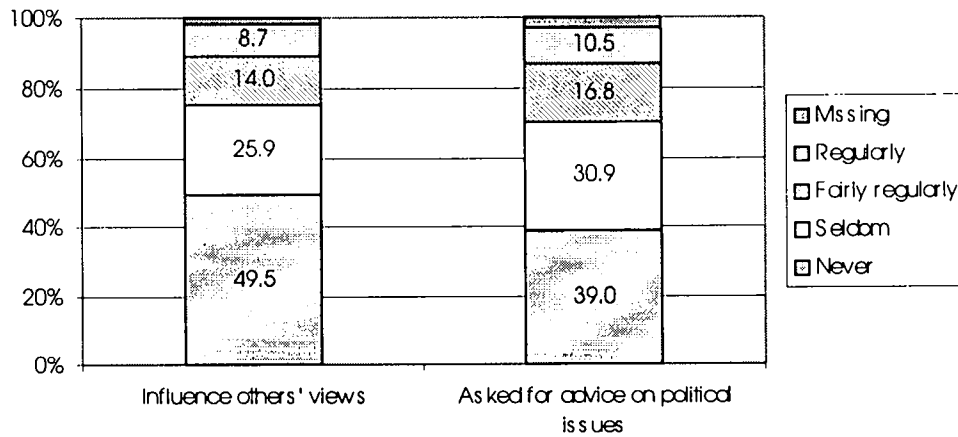
Low Cost	Medium Cost	High Cost
Asking for advice	Writing letters to media	Attending meetings
Influencing the views of others	Putting views to politicians	Being active in organisations

Along our scale, writing letters to the print media and putting views to politicians are medium cost activities, whilst being active in organisations and attending meetings

¹⁵ Costs here refer to the personal, financial and time sacrifices an individual make when participating in the activity. For example, writing a letter to a newspaper involves becoming aware of an issue, formulating an opinion about it, deciding that a letter is the appropriate means to express that opinion, setting time aside to write the letter and seeing that it is delivered. The latter part constitutes a financial cost to the writer (for transport and/or mail delivery). On the other hand

and gatherings are high cost activities. Costs are calculated, albeit informally and arbitrarily, by looking at the time, effort and (sometimes) financial implications of participating in each activity. Following this, we argue that it costs less being asked for advice than writing a letter to a newspaper simply because the latter takes more time, preparation and involves a deliberate decision to act. In short it takes more time and effort to write a letter than giving advice. Accordingly, it costs more to attend a meeting or to take part in the activities of political and other institutions than to write a letter. One would therefore expect to find that participation would decline as the costs of the activities would increase.¹⁶

Figure 7. Frequency that UNAM Students Engage in Political Activities with Low Costs Associated with Participation (n = 564)



By far the majority of students indicated that they seldom, if ever, participate in low cost activities. For both activities scores of close to or more than 70% were recorded in the categories 'seldom' and 'never.' Slightly more students are regularly asked for advice on political issues, than trying to influence the views of others.

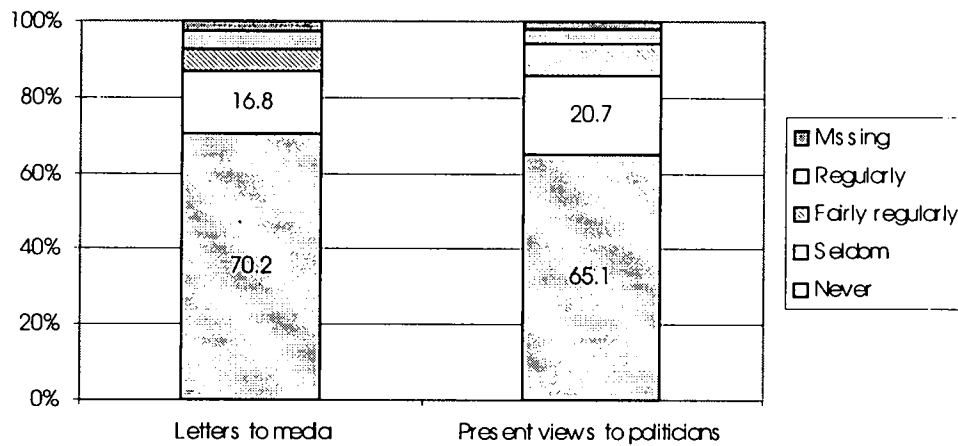
Even fewer students are participating in medium cost activities. Here scores of well over 80% were recorded among those who 'never' or 'seldom' participate in such activities. Up to this level, the proposition linking costs of activity with levels of participation holds substance.

trying to influence the views of others can happen during a class break through a casual discussion in the student cafeteria. Here there would be none of the discomforts or costs that are incurred when writing a letter.

¹⁶ We have to make it clear that our scale is not a standard one, and that its only purpose is to categorise and separate the different activities from each other. These categories and the list of activities are not exhaustive but cover only those we anticipated as fairly 'common' among Namibian students. In a different context (eg. South Africa during the 1980's), therefore, all these activities might be classified as 'low cost'.

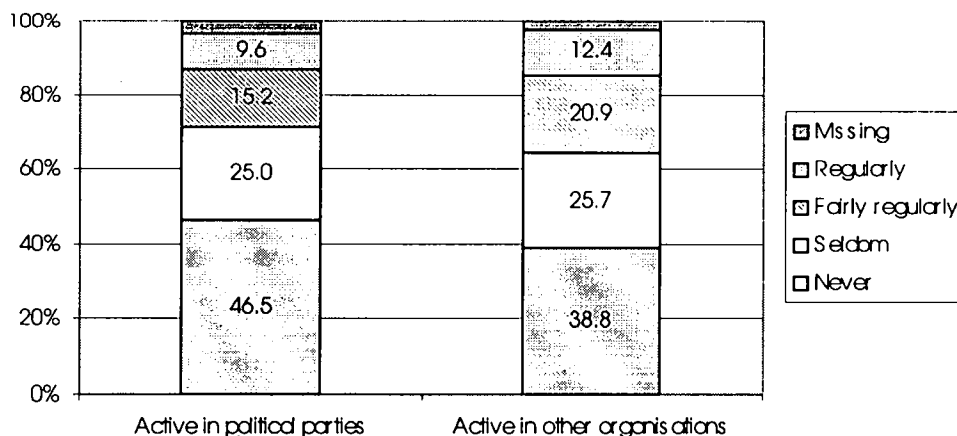
Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

Figure 8. Frequency that UNAM Students Engage in Political Activities with Medium Costs Associated with Participation (n = 564)



When it comes to high cost activities more students are regularly involved in the activities of parties and other organisations than was the case with the medium cost activities. One possible explanation could be that a significant proportion of the sample (15%) is employed in the public sector while others are part-time employees of a variety of NGO's. Some belong to various youth organisations, so being active politically would be part of their daily work routine.

Figure 9. Frequency that UNAM Students Engage in Political Activities with High Costs Associated with Participation (n = 564)



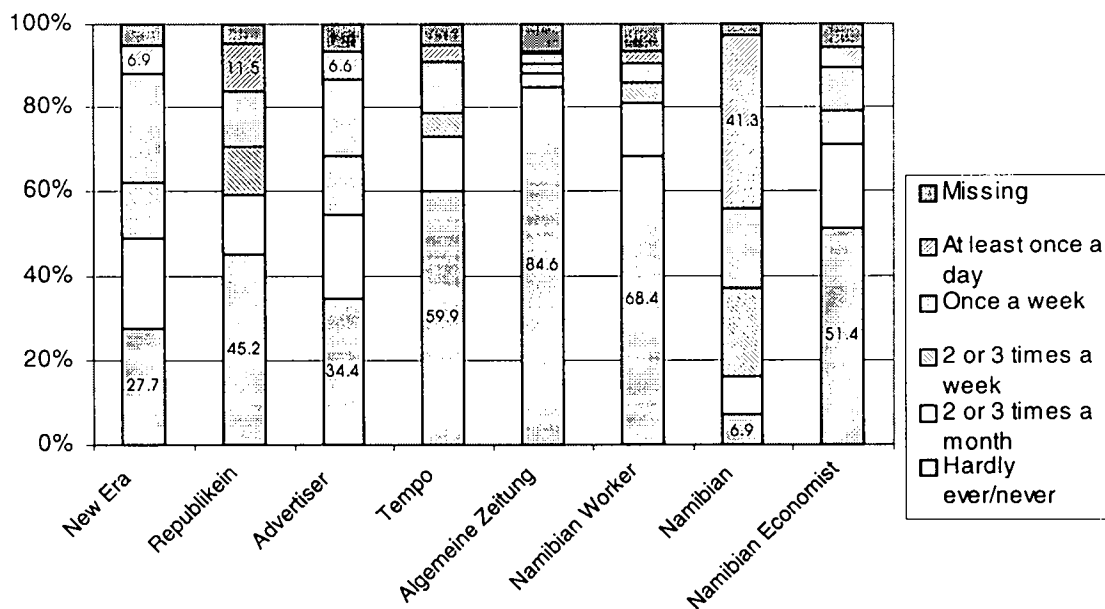
4.1.4 The Media as a Source of Political Information

To start, we assumed the media to be an important source of political information. From Section 4.1.2 Discussing Politics, we know that students discuss political matters, but not

frequently and not with people whose views are different from their own. This trend, we feel, increases the potential importance of the media as an alternative source of information. We also consider the media to be an important agent of socialisation. To understand the impact of the media on the political opinions and attitudes of our sample population, we need to know, firstly, what type of media is used and secondly, how often it is used. Finally, we also need to establish the degree of credibility attached to the various media sources. For the media to be effective it needs to be consulted regularly, and perhaps even more important, users must trust or believe the information provided.

We have categorised the media (print, visual and audio) into three broad categories: state-owned, partisan and independent. As far as state-owned media is concerned, the following sources were identified: *New Era* (newspaper) and NBC (various radio and television programmes). The category 'independent' consisted of *The Namibian*, *The Windhoek Observer* and *The Namibian Economist* (newspapers) while 'partisan' included: *Die Republikein*, *The Advertiser*, *Die Tempo*, *Algemeine Zeitung* (all owned by DMH and hence, directly or indirectly associated with the DTA) and *The Namibian Worker* (NUMW). Depending on the line of argument, the *New Era* can also be included in the last category (SWAPO). We have however, decided to keep it state-owned not only because of real ownership, but also due to its mission. With regard to the frequency of usage, the various types of media recorded mixed responses.

Figure 10. Frequency UNAM Students Read Various Newspapers (state owned, partisan and independent) (n = 564)

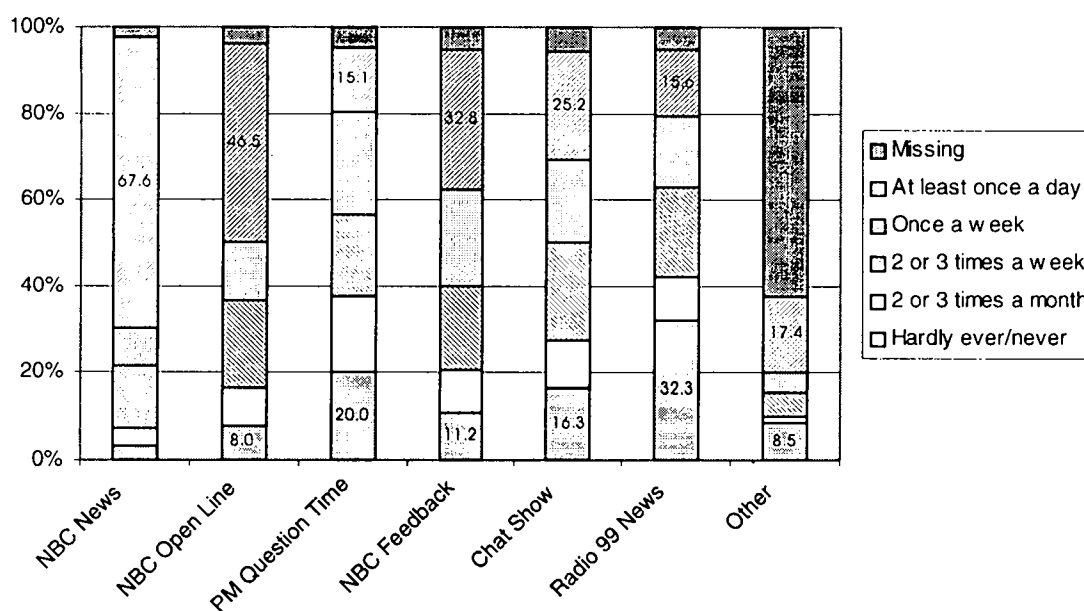


Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

The extent to which papers are read also depends on factors other than their affiliation or readers preferences for their contents. Factors such as cost, distribution and availability, circulation numbers and language play an important part. In our measurement above, for example, we have a combination of monthly, weekly and daily papers. Also a combination of papers in one or more languages and papers with large and small print runs. Some papers (e.g. *The Namibian Economist* and *The Namibian Worker*) are 'specialist' papers and are directed at specific target groups or audiences.

Even if we take all the above into account, it remains clear that the majority of respondents do not make frequent use of papers to obtain political information. If we collapse the first three categories together to comprise a single category called 'regular' and the fourth and the fifth as 'irregular', the trends become clearer. At least four papers (including all three types) are read regularly by a substantial proportion of the respondents. These are *The Namibian* (81%), the *New Era* (46.1%), *Die Republikein* (36%) and *The Advertiser* (38.9%). *Tempo* (22.1%) and *The Namibian Economist* (23%) fared the best of the rest.¹⁷ In all cases except *The Namibian*, the largest category of respondents indicated that they hardly ever, or never, read the papers. This trend then is similar to that for personal discussions.

Figure 11. Frequency UNAM Students Listen to Various Radio Programmes (state owned and independent) (n = 564)



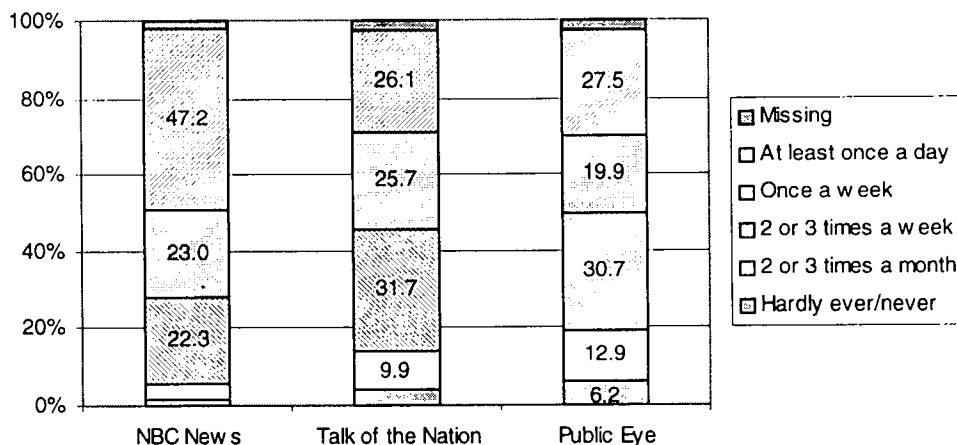
¹⁷ Both the *Tempo* and *The Advertiser* closed down since the survey was conducted.

Following our categories for newspapers, the main difference pertaining to radio is that there are no exclusive, partisan, radio stations. The alternative stations do seem to be more focused on entertainment although they broadcast news with a political content. Hence, state-owned radio (the NBC) is the predominant source of political information distributed in this manner. It has the additional advantage of broadcasting services in all the main languages spoken in the country. In our questionnaire we did not use an exhaustive list of NBC programmes with political content but tested only those we felt dealt predominantly with the (political) issues of the day.

Generally radio is much more important than newspapers as source of political information. It is also more important than personal discussions. The most frequented listened to radio programme is the NBC News followed by Open Line and NBC Feedback. While the former contains controlled information, the latter two are based on uncontrolled public inputs. These latter two programmes are for open use by the public and therefore often contain a variety of views. It is interesting to note that Prime Minister’s Question Time fared worst of the five NBC programmes tested. Independent radio news and political programmes did not seem to enjoy the same popularity as those of the NBC.

There are no private television stations in Namibia, hence our trilogy of categories does not apply here. We have tested views on the three main programmes containing socio-political contents: the NBC News, Talk of the Nation and Public Eye. The latter two are discussion programmes, and so, are often more in-depth and critical than the news broadcast.

Figure 12. Frequency UNAM Students Watch Various Television Programmes (state owned) (n = 564)



Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

Television is generally less frequented than radio as a source of political information but it is much more frequented than most newspapers. News is most popular on television, with Talk of the Nation second. Television reaches a much more passive audience (no more effort is required than to sit and watch) than newspapers, but is much more costly than radio and the newspapers. It is often regarded as a much more efficient source of information because it is more 'personal' and because it reaches more of the receivers' senses. Radio, among students, is perhaps the most accessible source of political information. In the long run it might also be cheaper than the daily costs associated with newspapers.

Slightly more respondents (64.9%) felt that television was a more reliable source of information than those finding newspapers were reliable (54.5%). In both instances the reliability rate is high, suggesting perhaps that most respondents are not 'critical readers.' Most felt that television and/or newspapers contain all the relevant political information.

4.2 Views and Attitudes towards Democratic Institutions¹⁸

There are at least two broad schools of thinking when it comes to defining democracy. There are those that support a *procedural* definition - i.e. democracy is a system of governance that guarantees and protects a wide number of civil freedoms and rights such as freedom of speech, association, participation and equality before the law. Then there are those that support the *substance* definition - i.e. that mere procedural guarantees are not enough, but that democracy is the system best equipped to secure the material well-being of its citizens (Przeworski *et al* 1995:40 & 41). Democratic institutions, especially in new democracies, are expected to produce outcomes that not only guarantee and protect the civil liberties of the citizens, but also outcomes that improve their material well being. This section focuses on the extent to which these institutions succeed in producing the desired outcomes.

A further debate revolves about the 'best' order of democratic governance, and here opinion is divided between supporters of presidentialism and supporters of parliamentarianism.¹⁹ It is not our aim here to address the debate. We are merely interested in gauging public opinion on aspects of presidentialism and parliamentarianism

¹⁸ We followed Bratton and van de Walle (1987:40) in defining institutions. "[They] are sets of constraints on behaviour in the form of rules and regulations; a set of procedures to detect deviations from the rules and regulations; and finally a set of moral ethical, behavioural norms which define the contours that constrain the way in which the rules and regulations are specified and enforcement carried out." Institutions can be formal or informal, abstract or concrete and can include informal customs.

¹⁹ See for example the debate between Litz, Horowitz and others in Diamond and Plattner (1996).

in Namibia. As a result, we have limited our discussion here to elected institutions.²⁰ This, of course, would also enable us to assess institutional spill-off such as legitimacy.

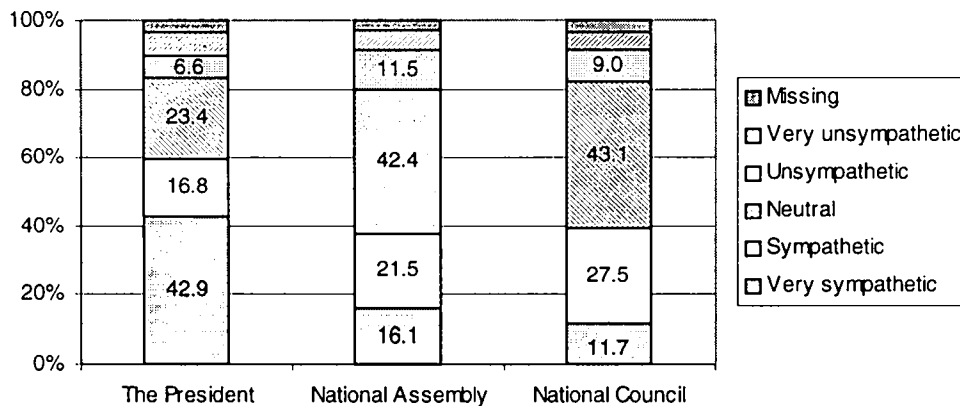
By virtue of the Constitution, Namibia has an executive president with wide ranging powers. Over the years since Independence, these powers have been expanded significantly, both formally and informally.²¹ In fact, a quick overview of recent developments suggests that Namibia is moving in the direction of a neo-patrimonial state.²² This has become very clear during the debate around a third term for President Nujoma.²³

Levels of public sympathy, trust, approval and understanding of various components and levels of elected government were tested. Three levels were identified: central, regional and local.

4.2.1 National (Central) Government

Here we have identified and tested the three institutions: the President, the National Assembly and the National Council. Overall, questions were formulated to test for affection/sympathy and efficiency, the two central components of political legitimacy.

Figure 13. Percent of UNAM Students who have Sympathy for Central Government Institutions (n = 564)



²⁰ We have collected opinions on a much broader range of institutions that include the judiciary, the military, parastatals and the executive. These are not included here but will be made available through in an additional publication.

²¹ Formally, several new laws including the Namibia Intelligence Service Act granted the President substantial powers *vis-a-vis* Parliament. Informally the President's powers over Parliament are derived from his control over SWAPO party list.

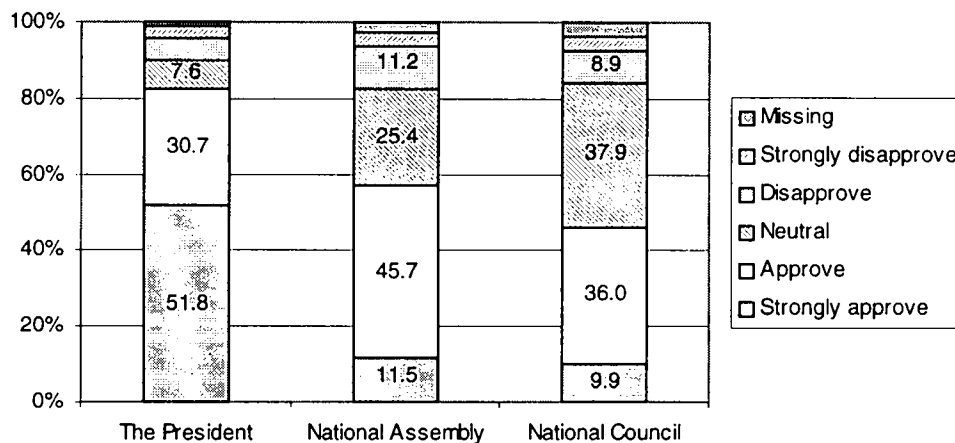
²² Patrimonial systems of government are characterised by the personalisation of power and authority. "... an individual rules by dint of personal prestige and power; ordinary folk are treated as extensions of the 'big man's' household, with no rights or privileges other than that bestowed by the ruler (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997:61). Neo-patrimonialism is "... those hybrid political systems in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse, rational-legal institutions" (Bratton and Van De Walle 1997:63).

²³ Two particular aspects of neo-patrimonialism were highlighted: the Presidents 'benevolence', his image as *pater familias*; and his entitlement to be rewarded for his service to the country.

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

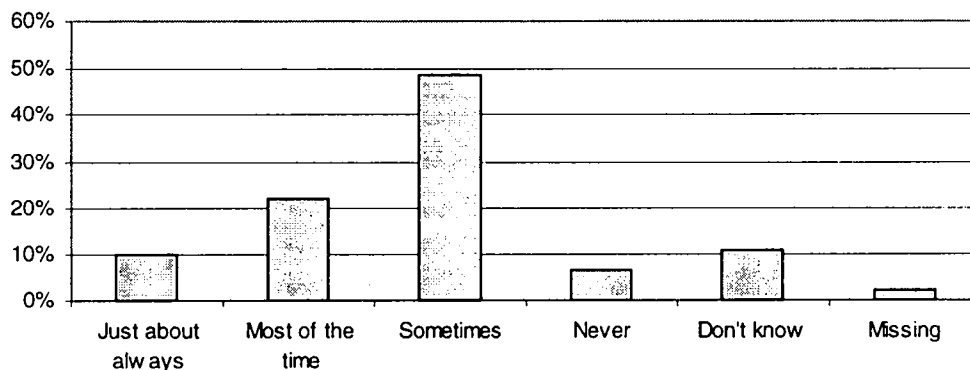
Perhaps most notable here is the relatively low level of sympathy for the two Houses of Parliament, especially when compared with that of the President. Almost 60% of respondents were sympathetic towards the President while the National Assembly (almost 38%) and the National Council (almost 40%) fared much worse. Overall, almost the majority of respondents were apathetic towards the House of Parliament.

Figure 14. Percent of UNAM Students who Approve of the Performance of Central Government Institutions (n = 564)



This shows the same trend as the previous table. Again the President is seen in much more positive light. Over 80% of respondents approved of the way the President has performed his tasks, with more than 50% approving strongly. In contrast, only 11.5% approved strongly of way the National Assembly performed its tasks and only 9.9% did so for the National Council. Overall (i.e. combining strong and moderate views), however, the latter two institutions fared better as more than 57% of respondents approved of the National Assembly's and almost 46% approved of the National Council's performance.

Figure 15. Percent UNAM Students who Trust the National Government (n = 564)



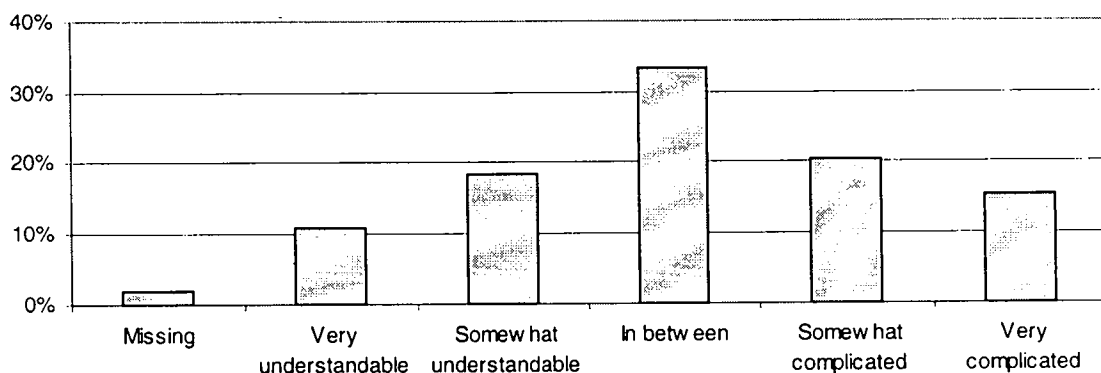
From the figure above, it shows that most respondents did not express high levels of trust in the national government (excluding the President). This could mean several things, such as that:

- 1) the respondents are not 'blind followers' and are suspicious as to whose interests are being looked after;
- 2) the respondents are cynical but not outright negative about the operations/motives of Government; and perhaps,
- 3) they are losing faith in the operations/motives of Government.

What is also significant is although almost 32% of respondents indicated that they had fairly high levels of trust in Government, the majority (48.6%) showed more moderate levels of trust. Furthermore, while only 6.6% indicated that they never trust Government to do what is right, a further 10.6% were not sure whether or not they trust Government to do the right thing. Trust is something that does not come naturally. It has to be earned. The dominant pattern here suggests that the national government has some work to do.

When asked whether they felt they understood what was going on in Government, almost equal proportions of respondents expressed positive and negative answers.

Figure 16. Percent of UNAM Students who think the National Government is Complicated (n = 564)



Almost 36% felt that central government is complicated and that they do not always know what going on. Slightly less, almost 30% felt the opposite while 33.2% indicated a position somewhere in between these. This suggests that there is a need for political education. This does not mean that respondents are feeling helpless or without hope to change matters. When we wanted to know whether or not respondents would be able to do something when the National Assembly is considering a law 'that is harmful or

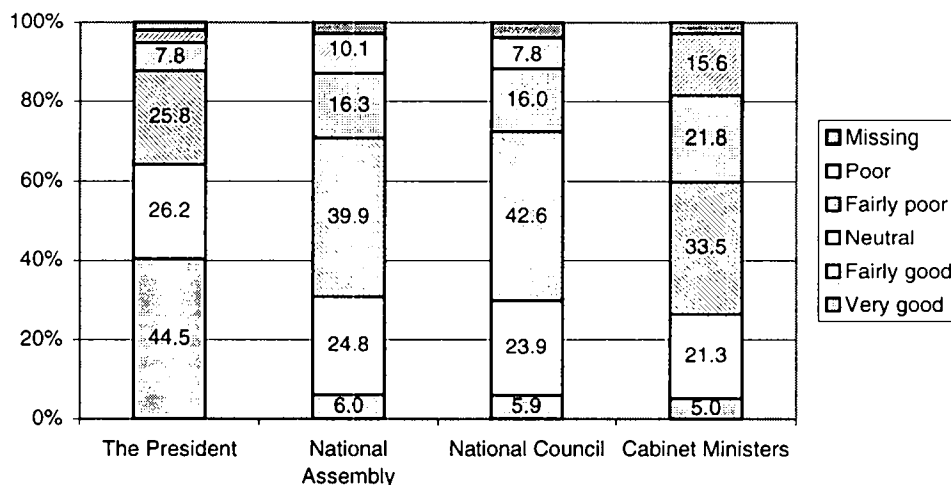
Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

unjust', most respondents (43.5%) felt that they would be able to. Slightly fewer respondents (40.4%) felt the same way about the National Council.

A more negative trend was observed about the degree to which respondents think those in the National Assembly know what ordinary people think. Here 45% did not think that Members of the Assembly know what ordinary people think while only 23.4% felt that they have a good idea. The rest, 28%, expressed a view somewhere in between these two. For the National Council, the responses were slightly different. Slightly more than 42% thought that Members of the Council did not know what ordinary people think while almost 29% thought that they did. Thirty-two percent (32%) expressed a middle view.

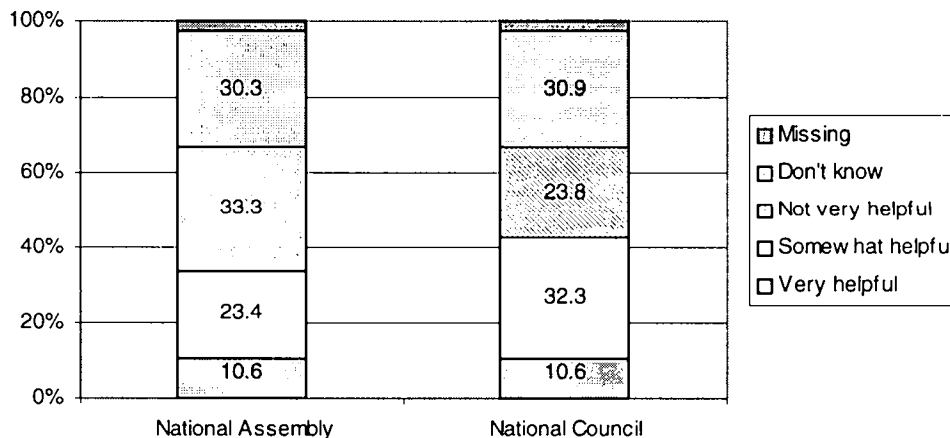
We were also interested to find out whether the central institutions keep in touch with their constituency, the common person in the street. This issue is of particular importance, because of the party-list system used to facilitate the election of public representatives to the National Assembly. At the same time, the results for the National Assembly can be compared with the results for the National Council, a body elected through a different system. Whereas the party-list system is often criticised for gelding representatives from a clearly defined constituency, and hence promoting elitism, the ward-based system is often presented as a viable, more populist oriented alternative. In this line of argument, the latter creates better opportunities for constituency inputs and accountability. In short, one would expect representatives elected through the latter system to be more in touch with what their constituencies feel, think and desire. We then put these arguments to the test in asking respondents to what extent they think the various elected central institutions do a good job of keeping in touch with the people.

Figure 17. Percent of UNAM Students who think National Government Institutions Keep in Touch with Ordinary People (n = 564)



The main feature recorded above is the poor performance of all the institutions under review (plus Cabinet) compared to the President. The crux of the matter is reflected in the 'very good' column where only the President recorded any significant support. Although support for the other three agencies were significantly higher in the second column, overall their performances remain dismal with on average less than 30% of respondents expressing a positive view. A second feature of the views discussed here is the high levels of 'neutral' responses. Again the President fared best of all four in the sense that he recorded lowest levels of 'neutral' responses. For Cabinet the largest proportion of responses was outright negative, suggesting perhaps that they fared worse in keeping in touch with the people. The National Council attracted more positive responses than the National Assembly did when we enquired about their perceived willingness to assist the public in solving their problems.

Figure 18. Percent of UNAM Students who think National Government Institutions are Helpful Solving Problems (n = 564)



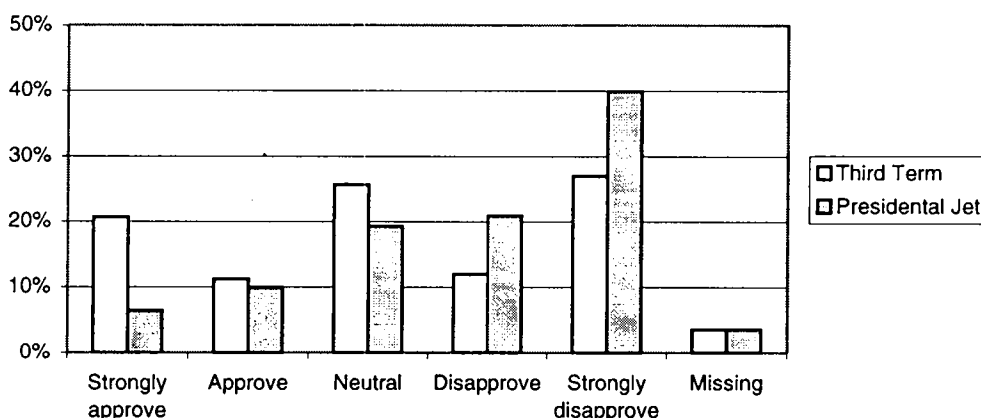
With regard to national government the pattern is clear, students have rallied their support behind the person of the President rather than the collectivity of Parliament. Further responses indicate, however, that their support is not of the blanket type. Questions on whether the Constitution should be amended to provide for a third term in office, and whether he should buy a new presidential jet bear testimony to the conditionality.

Students are divided about the third term issue. Most have strong rather than moderate feelings about the issue. The outright negative views on the new presidential jet issue, is perhaps most significant. It suggests that his benevolent image does not secure support for actions that could be interpreted as 'squandering' or 'excessive.' The

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

expectations are clear: the *pater familias* should look after everybody, not himself. These qualifications, we believe, bear testimony to the fact that Namibia has not yet developed into a full-blown neo-patrimonial state, despite the developments that point in that direction. But the foundations seem to be there; public support and affection are directed towards a single personality rather than collective institutions.

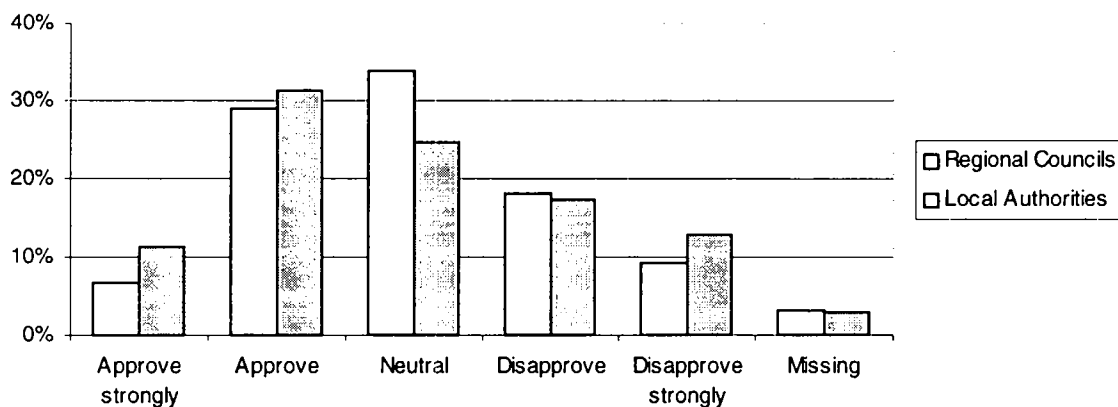
Figure 19. Percent of UNAM Students who Support the President for a Third Term and the Purchase of a New Presidential Jet (n = 564)



4.2.2 Sub-National Levels of Government

Here we tested for the same views and opinions as above, but for the two sub-national structures of government, namely the regional councils and local authorities.

Figure 20. Percent of UNAM Students who Approve of the Performance of Sub-National Government Structures (n = 564)

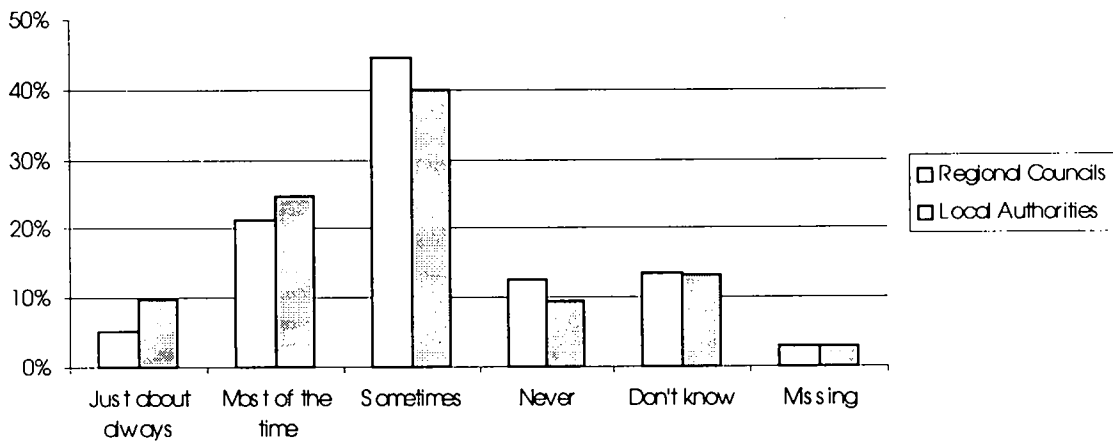


Overall, both structures attracted more positive responses than negative ones. Slightly more than 35% approved of the way regional councils performed their functions

while 27.5% disapproved. For local authorities both positive and negative responses were higher at 42.6% and 30.3% respectively. As a result, 'neutrals' were lower here at 24.5% than for the regional councils. In general, respondents felt that central/national institutions were better at performing their tasks than those at sub-national level.

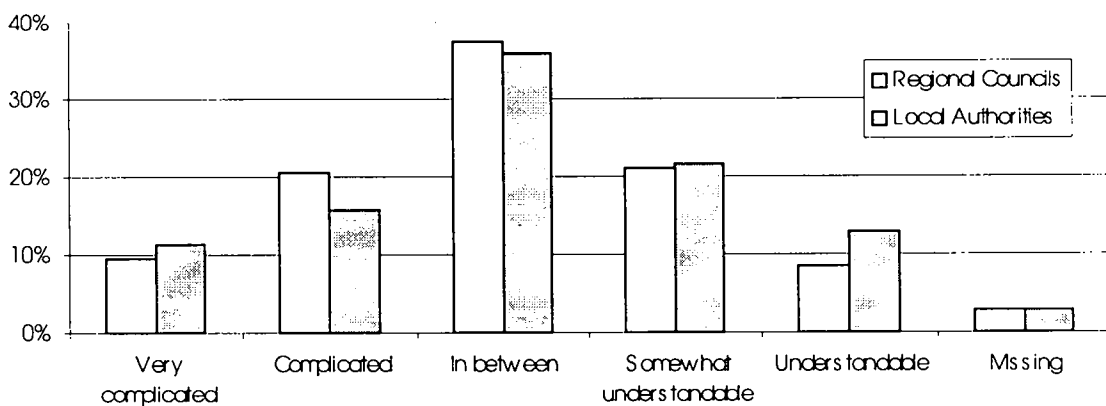
As far as trusting sub-national representatives to do what is right is concerned, the trend is similar to that recorded for the national institutions.

Figure 21. Percent UNAM Students who Trust Sub-National Structures (n = 564)



Local authorities recorded slightly higher levels of trust than regional councils. Slightly more than 34% of respondents showed higher levels of trust in local authorities while the majority (almost 50%) showed lower levels of trust. Overall, the levels of trust are moderate. For regional councils the trend is similar. Little more than 26% showed higher levels of trust while more than 57% showed lower levels of trust.

Figure 22. Percent of UNAM Students who think Sub-National Structures are Complicated (n = 564)



Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

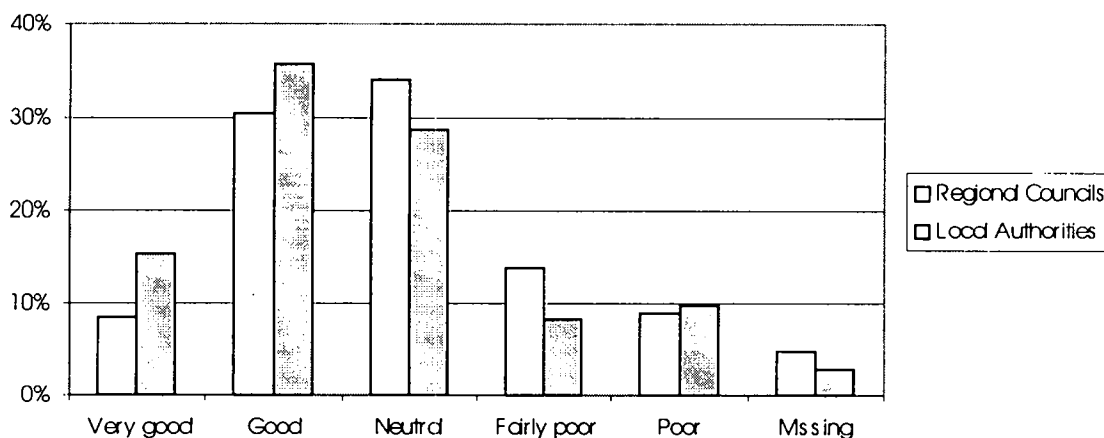
The figure above indicates that being 'closer to the people' does not necessarily mean that people have a better understanding of how the agencies of government work and function.

Slightly more respondents felt that regional councils are complicated, compared to the views on local authorities. This however, is a small and negligible difference. Overall, respondents were divided in their views for both agencies, with the majority expressing a view of 'in between.' Compared to the national institutions, the sub-national ones are viewed in slightly better light. Again, the differences are small.

The sub-national structures fared better than the national institutions when it comes to knowing what ordinary people think. Here 37% of respondents indicated that they are of the opinion that regional councils know what ordinary people think, whilst 43% felt the same way about local authorities. In between views were 33% for the regional councils and 28% for the local authorities. Here we have found some support for the notion that these institutions are 'closer to the people' and therefore are better equipped to know what they think.

As far as doing something about unjust or wrong policies or actions, the trend for sub-national levels of government is very similar to that of the national institutions. Here the majority expressed in between views: 32.6% for local authorities; and, 38.7% for regional councils. With the exception of the President, the sub-national structures attracted much more positive responses than the national as far as keeping in touch their constituencies is concerned.

Figure 23. Percent of UNAM Students who think Sub-National Structures Keep in Touch with Ordinary People (n = 564)



The overall trend is a positive one. Almost 39% of respondents felt that regional councils are doing a good job in keeping in touch with ordinary people while even more,

almost 50%, felt the same way about local authorities. Again the local authorities fared better than the regional councils, and both of them did much better than Cabinet and the National Council (and slightly better than the National Assembly).

When it came to the willingness to assist members of the public with their problems, both structures attracted almost exactly equal amounts of positive responses, 54.4% and 54.6% respectively. This is much higher than what was recorded for the National Assembly (34%) and the National Council (42.9%). The last two figures therefore support the view that decentralised agencies are better at looking after the interests and needs of local constituencies.

Overall then sub-national levels of government were viewed more positively than the collective entities at the national level. This suggests that the latter collectives are perceived to be distanced from their constituencies. The differences in opinion towards the national and sub-national collectivities are small and the overall patterns similar, suggesting consistency in the views expressed.

4.3 The Democratic Regime

Regimes are usually defined as the rules, regulations, norms and codes of conduct that regulate relations between the various institutions of the state, and between the state (as a whole) and the citizenry. Based on this definition, Namibia has a democratic regime and most of the ground-rules for this regime type are contained and safeguarded in the Constitution. Analysts disagree about the criteria for a consolidated and sustainable democracy. Usually the presence of a democratic regime is not considered sufficient for a sustainable democracy. Some would argue for the presence of a strong opposition with a real chance to capture power through the vote while others would regard at least one peaceful exchange of power through the vote as real indicators of a sustainable democracy. Either way, Namibia must still be regarded as a polity in transition or a democracy in the making as one party won all elections (convincingly) thus far.

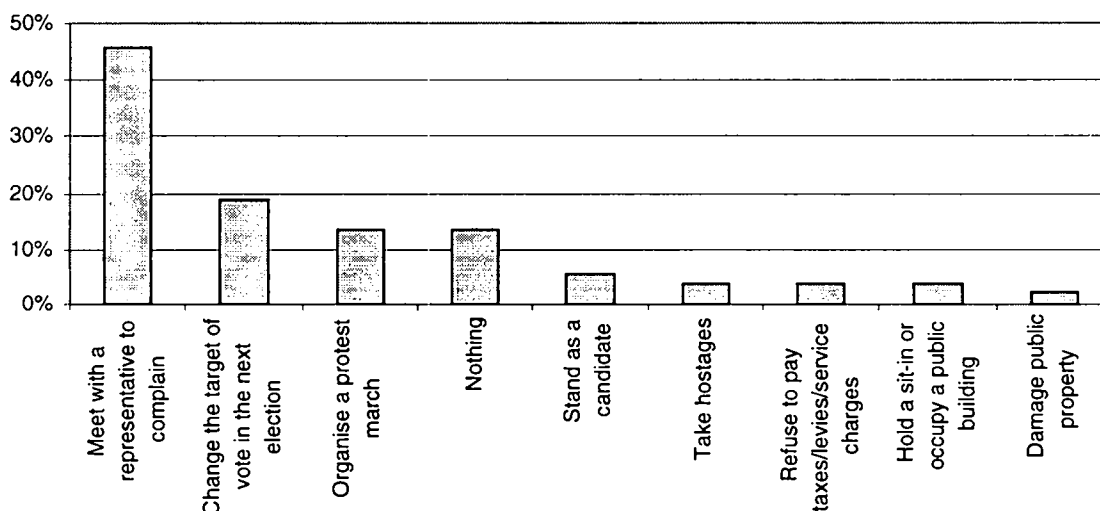
A different school of thinking maintains that in a consolidated and sustained democracy, citizens and elites must adhere to the specific requirements and obligations associated with a democratic dispensation. Democratic values and principles must be absorbed into the social fabric of the society. Once this is achieved, a democratic political culture is entrenched and state-societal and intra-societal conflicts would be regulated according to broadly accepted principles, procedures and institutions. Democracy is as much a mechanism to protect the citizenry from the state as it is a mechanism to protect citizens or groups of citizens from each other.

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

Although the survey was not designed as an exclusive test of Namibia's emerging political culture, it contained several important questions in this regard. These questions dealt with perceptions on public protest, tolerance, coercive state actions, voter efficacy and the meaning/nature of the democratic regime.

Overall, respondents displayed low inclination towards popular protest. This may be as a result of their relatively strong apolitical dispositions and/or the absence of sufficient levels of anger or discontent. This is quite different from students elsewhere in the region and on the continent. Further studies might be able to explore the exact reasons for apathy. It might also be the result of the general peace and stability found in the Namibian society and that students as a 'privileged' group might have little immediate reason to be politically active. Whatever the reason, our findings suggest that students (at this point in time at least) are sympathetic to the practises commonly associated with democratic conduct.²⁴

Figure 24 First Choice Protest Strategies of UNAM Students in Rank Order (n = 564)



The most preferred first option (and significantly higher than the second option) is to meet with representatives and complain. The second most preferred first option is to switch parties/candidates while the third most preferred first option is to both do nothing and organise a protest march. All first choices are low cost resistance/protest strategies. Protest actions that potentially hold significant personal costs or the threat of state induced sanctions are not popular. They are however, more preferable as second or third

²⁴ This does not mean, however, that students are democrats at heart. Their strong intolerance of social formations such as gay and lesbian rights movements is testimony to the often contradictory values they embody.

choice options. This suggests that they would only be considered once other avenues have been explored. The relatively high responses of 'nothing' as a third option show that other options will be taken before 'giving up.'

Figure 25 Second Choice Protest Strategies of UNAM Students in Rank Order (n = 564)

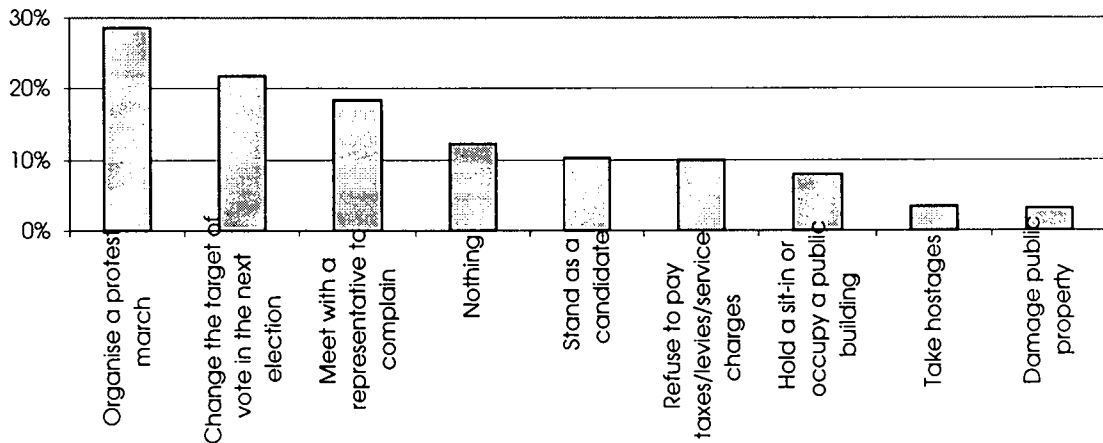
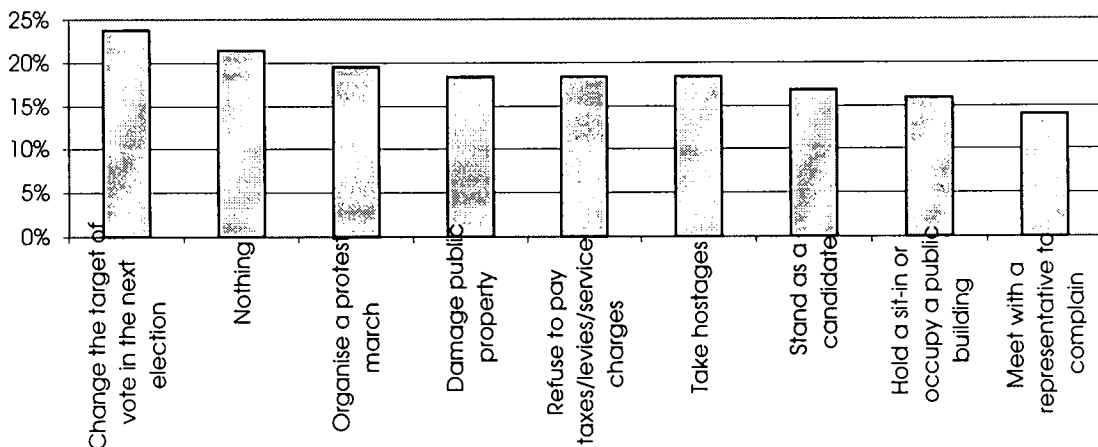


Figure 26 Third Choice Protest Strategies of UNAM Students in Rank Order (n = 564)



In general, almost all respondents, throughout all questions, expressed strong negative feelings against use of state force against protesting citizens. This could be interpreted as either a form of tolerance towards the expression of societal discontent, or a strong disagreement against excessive use of state force against citizens engaged in public protest.

As to the meaning of democracy we found contrasting views. We tested for two different meanings of democracy: one essentially a *substance (economic)* definition that

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

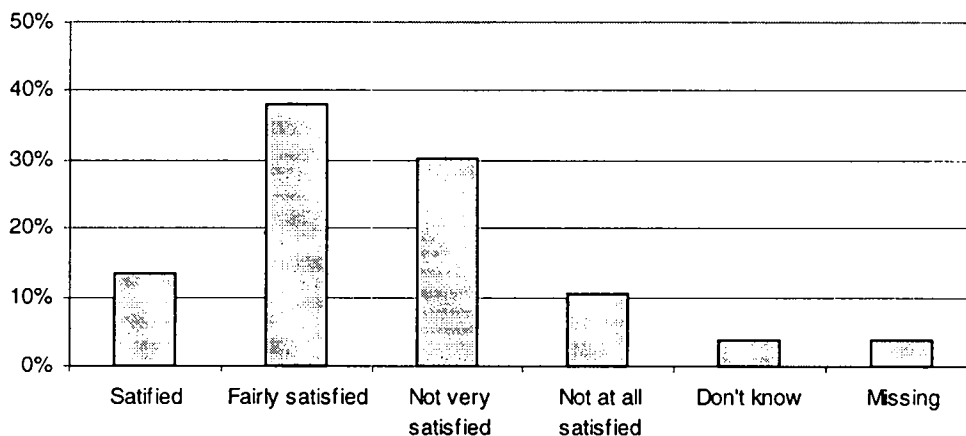
holds that democracy is a tool to improve one's life economically; the other the *procedural (political)* definition that states that democracy is a tool to popularly elect representatives and safeguard civil liberties. The majority of respondents preferred the political definition with 39% expressing their clear support. Only 17% of respondents preferred the economic definition, whilst the others (30%) preferred a definition that lies somewhere in between. As far as the requirements for democracy is concerned, the following was regarded as either essential or important:

- at least two strong parties that compete with each other (67%);
- regular elections (81.4%);
- complete freedom to criticise government (69.4%);
- equal access to houses, jobs and a decent income (73.7%);
- majority rule (61%);
- strong president (61.1%);
- a small gap between rich and poor (52.1%); and,
- minority rights (55.7%).

Again here is no clear preference for either a clear economic or political understanding of what a democracy requires. In fact, respondents have included all options given, suggesting perhaps that the emphasis was on democracy rather than the specific requirements.

On the question of whether or not they were satisfied with the way democracy works, the responses were closely divided.

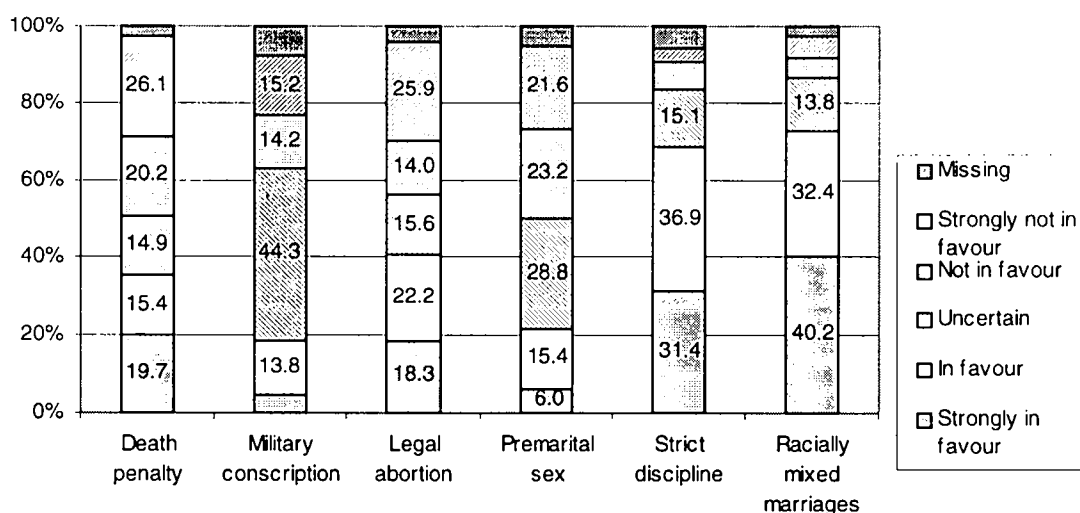
Figure 27. Percent of UNAM Students Satisfied with the Performance of Democracy (n = 564)



Although the majority of respondents are happy with the performance of democracy in Namibia, a more than significant proportion (40.8%) are not satisfied. Some of the institutional aspects (distance from constituencies, uncertainty about which institutions could be trusted to do the right thing and the perception that corruption is common) discussed earlier could perhaps be the reason for this mixed view. What most respondents agreed on, however, is that irrespective of hardships and/or failures democracy is always best (60.8%). Only 20.7% expressed a need for a strong leader to replace or suspend democracy when things go wrong.

The students' current inclination towards what can only be described as liberal political conduct is not supported by their social values. Instead their beliefs about social issues are a real 'mixed bag' of liberalism and conservatism.²⁵ To gauge the social inclination of students, we measured their attitudes and beliefs towards a number of social issues. These and the views expressed towards them are contained in the figure below. Positive feelings towards social issues such as legalised abortion, premarital sex, racially mixed marriages, pornography, legalised prostitution gay and lesbian rights, and inter-ethnic marriages are commonly associated with a liberal social disposition. The converse on the issues, combined with positive feelings on the remaining issues, constitute a conservative disposition.²⁶

Figure 28 Percent of UNAM Students who Favour Various Social Values (n = 564)

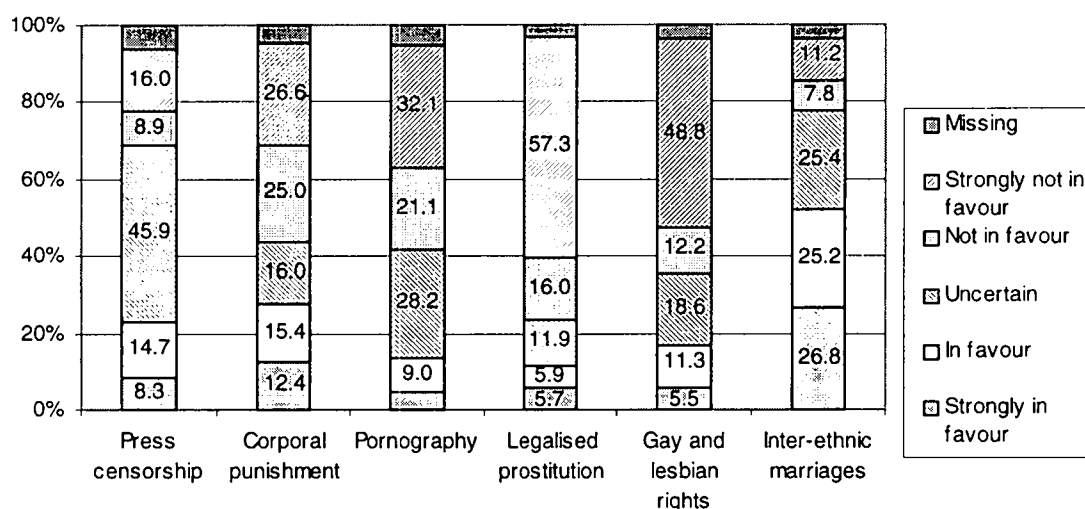


²⁵ Others might prefer to refer to this as the clash between 'traditionalism' and 'modernity.' Either way, emphasis is drawn to inconsistencies in the overall value system that are so typical of societies in transition.

²⁶ One has to be careful when recording social values as many of these are regarded a sensitive or highly personal in nature, and hence, prone to deceptive responses. On the issue of premarital sex, for instance, we know that the lie-factor was huge.

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

**Figure 28 Percent of UNAM Students who Favour Various Social Values (n = 564)
(continued)**



There are few clear and consistent patterns, for example: students would be much more positive about inter-racial marriages than inter-ethnic marriages.²⁷ Similarly many would support the notion of free speech, but nevertheless be opposed to pornography. Two important conclusions stem from this. First, students have a liberal political disposition, but not a liberal social one. This raises a number of important, unanswered questions. How committed are they really to liberal democracy? When times get tough, how much will they rely on conservative elements to save the day? Their social values suggest a strong preference for strict discipline. Furthermore, they seem to be inconsistent in their tolerance of alternative social movements (they are strongly opposed to gays and lesbians but very tolerant towards other social movements such as the unions). Second, the evidence seems to suggest that the Namibian society is still in transition, and hence, hybrid prevails. This society shows an inconsistent mixture of liberal and conservative value systems (or a mixture of 'traditionalism and modernity'). Democracy, and liberalism for that matter, has yet to become the dominant feature. The social culture cannot be regarded as supportive of a liberal political culture.

4.4 Corruption

Corruption is an extremely sensitive topic as it deals directly with trust and faith in those that handle and control public assets and finances. Our data is disturbing, suggesting that

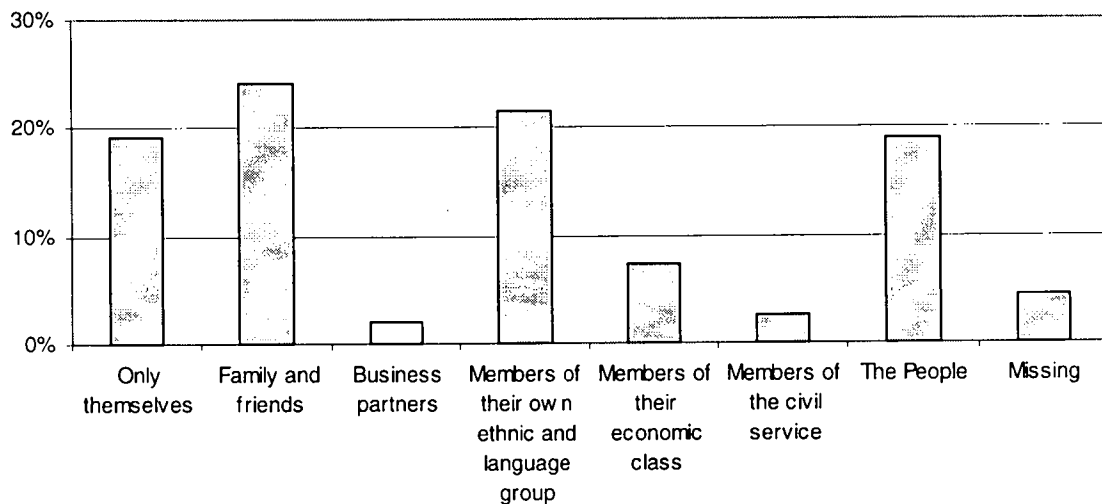
²⁷ At least one explanation given was that marriage to a white partner is considered to be 'marrying up'. Conversely marrying a partner from another ethnic groups is considered to be 'marrying down'.

trust has to be earned rather than taken for granted. The pattern is consistent with our analysis of public opinion and institutions presented earlier.

We have to emphasise here that what we present are the views and perceptions of a special group of the Namibian public. These perceptions do not reflect on any specific party or specific individuals holding public office. But perceptions are part of political reality and they highlight the challenges to government, the public service and the other institutions in the political system. In this way the views and opinions underscore the critical importance of institutions and policies dealing with public ethics and they form an important part of the process to make a fair judgement of political officialdom.

Our first observation deals with the question of who is it that the government (public servant and politicians) are **mostly** concerned with helping.

Figure 29 Who UNAM Students Think is Helped Most by Government (n = 564)

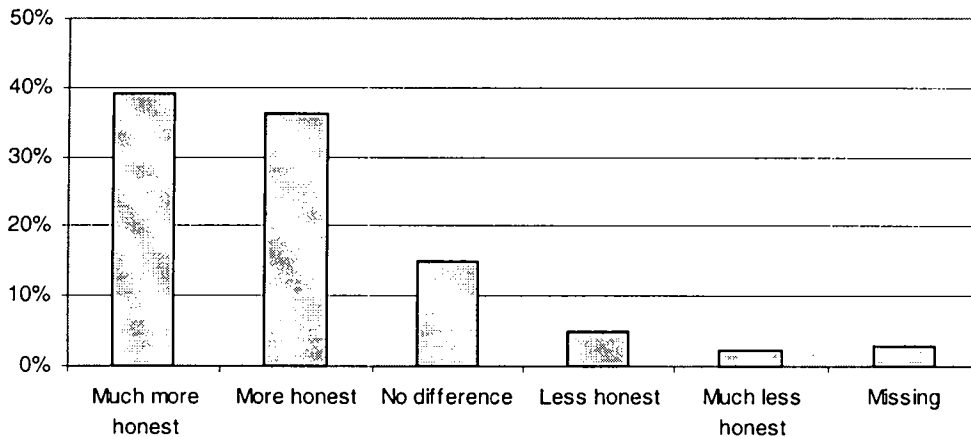


The *first* important finding is that more than 85% of respondents are of the opinion that government officials are primarily concerned with helping groups and individuals other than ‘the people.’ *Secondly*, the majority of respondents feel that family/friends and members of the same ethnic groups are primary beneficiaries of government officials’ actions. This suggests that public opinion holds an understanding of public affairs to be conducted along the lines of personal and/or ethnic patronage. There seems to be little support for class-based explanations.

Our **second** observation deals with popular expectations towards public officials’ honesty.

Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

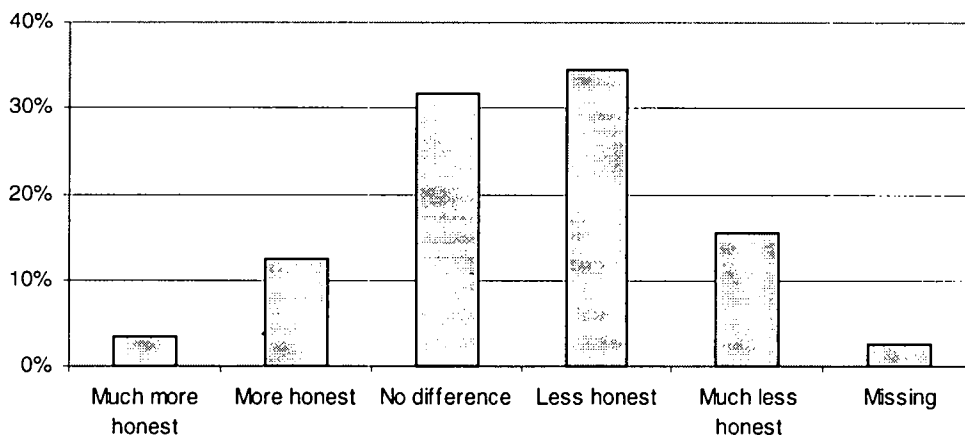
Figure 30. Do UNAM Students Think that People Elected to Government should be More Honest than Ordinary People (n = 564)



Over 75% of respondents are of the opinion that elected officials should be more honest than ordinary people should be. Only 14.9% expect them to be no different than ordinary people. Less than 8% feel that they should be less honest. There are thus high expectations about the way public officials should conduct their business with public resources as 39% expect their representatives to be 'much more honest' than ordinary people.

Our **third** observation deals with whether or not public officials **are** more or less honest compared to ordinary people.

Figure 31. Do UNAM Students Think that People Elected to Government are More Honest than Ordinary People (n = 564)

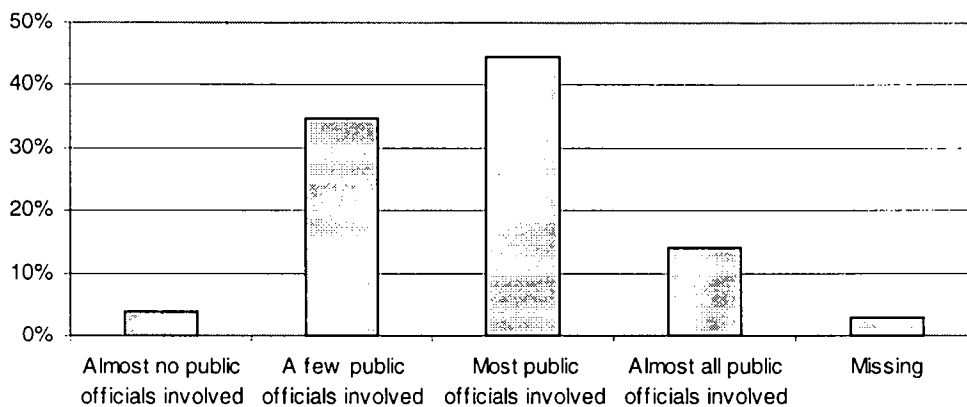


The responses suggest that public officials do not meet the expectations recorded above. Almost 50% (49.8%) of UNAM students are of the opinion that public officials are

less honest than ordinary people while Sixteen percent (16%) feel that public officials are more honest than ordinary people. A significant proportion, 31.7%, saw no difference.

The **fourth** observation deals with the extent to which government and civil service officials are involved in corruption.

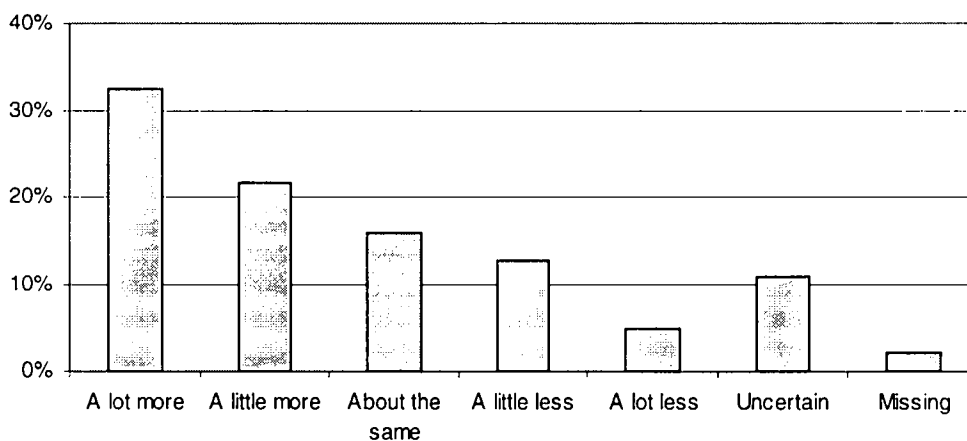
Figure 32. To What Extent do UNAM Students Think that the People in Government and the Civil Service are Involved in Corruption (use public monies for personal benefit) (n = 564)



Here too, the trend is disturbing. Only 3.9% of respondents indicate a near 'clean' public service. Although a substantial proportion (34.8%) feel that only a few officials engage in corrupt practices, the vast majority (54.5%) are of the opinion that most or all officials are involved. The number of 'complete cynics' totalled 14%.

Our **final** observation deals with the overall trend regarding corruption in the country.

Figure 33. Do UNAM Students Think that there is More Corruption than 5 Years Ago (n = 564)



Political Perspectives and Opinions of Namibian Students

Majority of respondents (54%) indicate that there is more corruption now than five years before. More than 32% are of the opinion that there is a lot more corruption now than five years ago. Only 17.4% feel that there was less corruption now. For 15.8% the level of corruption stayed the same.

The findings we presented above suggest that UNAM students have optimistic and high expectations about the moral fibre of their representatives and officials. However, these expectations are not met. Instead, the officials and representatives are perceived to look only after themselves and those close to them (family, friends and members of their ethnic groups). This, in turn, suggests that student opinion holds the view that public assets and finances are not utilised or distributed in an ethically sound manner and perhaps that the state and its resources are being 'privatised from within.'

Our findings seem to be consistent with that of Hanna in Nigeria. Politics are viewed as a career for creating personal wealth. In short, it is a dirty business in which public officials are committed not to the well-being of the nation or people, but their own and their family's well-being. Distribution of state resources, so the prevailing opinion holds, is along ethnic rather than class lines.

It is true that Namibia is relatively 'clean' when compared to other African states. But the truth is that nobody (besides a few of the 'privileged') knows how 'clean' Namibia really is. For example, Namibia has no assets register for parliamentarians like South Africa. As a result Namibians stand ignorant to their representatives' sources of wealth and income. Investigations into alleged corrupt senior state officials are not concluded promptly and suspensions are rare. If the problem is not corruption, but perceptions as some has argued, then the remedy is a public show of commitment and greater transparency.