

## 📖 Topic Page: [Namibia](#)

Definition: **Namibia** from *Collins English Dictionary*

*n*

**1** a country in southern Africa bordering on South Africa: annexed by Germany in 1884 and mandated by the League of Nations to South Africa in 1920. The mandate was terminated by the UN in 1966 but this was ignored by South Africa, as was the 1971 ruling by the International Court of Justice that the territory be surrendered. Independence was achieved in 1990 and Namibia became a member of the Commonwealth; Walvis Bay remained a South African enclave until 1994, when it was returned to Namibia. Official language: English; Afrikaans and German also spoken. Religion: mostly animist, with some Christians. Currency: dollar. Capital: Windhoek. Pop: 2 182 852 (2013 est). Area: 823 328 sq km (317 887 sq miles) Also called: **South West Africa** Former name (1885–1919): **German Southwest Africa**



Summary Article: **Namibia**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(nāmīb'ēə), officially Republic of Namibia, republic (2015 est. pop. 2,426,000), c.318,000 sq mi (823,620 sq km), SW Africa. It is bordered by Angola in the north, by Zambia in the northeast, by Botswana in the east, by South Africa in the southeast and south, and by the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The Orange River forms the southern boundary, and the Kunene, Cubango, and Zambezi rivers form parts of the northern and northeastern borders. The country

Image from: [NAMIBIA in Encyclopedia of Law Enforcement](#)

includes the Caprivi Strip in the northeast; there have been clashes there between government forces and separatists. The capital and largest city of Namibia is Windhoek.

### Land and People

The country has four main geographical regions: the arid and barren Namib Desert, which runs along the entire Atlantic coast with widths of from 50 to 80 mi (80–130 km); an extensive central plateau that averages c.3,600 ft (1,100 m) in elevation; the western fringes of the Kalahari Desert in the east; and an alluvial plain in the north that includes the Etosha Pan, a large salt marsh. The highest point is Brandberg Mt. (8,402 ft/2,561 m), situated in the western part of the central plateau. In addition to the capital, other towns include Keetmanshoop, Tsumeb, Lüderitz, Gobabis, and Otjiwarongo.

Namibia has an ethnically diverse population that includes the Bantu-speaking Ovambo (about 50% of the population), Kavango, and Herero; various Nama (see Khoikhoi) groups; the Damara; San (Bushmen); and whites of South African, German, and British descent. English is the official language, but most of the population speaks Afrikaans. About 80% of the population is Christian, and the rest follow traditional beliefs.

### Economy

Because of inadequate rainfall, crops are not widely raised and pastoralism forms the backbone of the agricultural sector. Goats and sheep are raised mainly in the south, and cattle are herded chiefly in the north. About half the people make their living by agriculture, mainly from Karakul pelts, livestock, and dairy goods. Millet, peanuts, sorghum, and grapes are grown. Unemployment is high, and much of the agricultural land remains in the hands of several thousand white farmers; this has led to pressure for land

redistribution, and the government has gradually transferred ownership to black Namibians through land purchases, some of which have involved expropriation.

The country's few manufactures are made up mostly of processed food. There is an extensive mining industry, run principally by foreign-owned companies. Namibia is a major producer of gem-quality diamonds, the country's principal export; the most significant diamond deposits are offshore. Other important minerals are uranium, lead, zinc, tin, silver, tungsten, and copper. There are significant but yet unexploited natural gas deposits offshore and iron deposits in NW Namibia. Fishing fleets operate in the Atlantic. Unrestricted fishing by commercial companies severely depleted the country's supply of certain types of fish, but stocks are being replenished.

The central part of the country is served by roads and rail lines that are linked with those of South Africa, its largest trading partner. The main exports are diamonds, copper, gold, zinc, lead, uranium, cattle, fish, and Karakul pelts. Foodstuffs, petroleum products, machinery and equipment, and chemicals are imported.

## **Government**

Namibia is governed under the constitution of 1990. The president, who is head of state, is popularly elected for a five-year term and is eligible for a second term. The government is headed by a prime minister, who is appointed by the president. There is a bicameral legislature. The National Council has 26 seats, with two members chosen from each regional council to serve six-year terms. Members of the 72-seat National Assembly are popularly elected for five-year terms. Administratively, the country is divided into 13 regions.

## **History**

### *Early History and Colonialism*

The earliest inhabitants of Namibia were San hunters and gatherers, who lived there as early as 2,000 years ago. By c.A.D. 500, Nama herders had entered the region; they have left early records of their activities in the form of cave paintings. The Herero people settled in the western and northern areas of Namibia around 1600. The Ovambo migrated into Namibia after about 1800.

Diogo Cam and Bartolomeu Dias, both Portuguese navigators, landed on the coast in the early 15th cent. Portuguese and Dutch expeditions explored the coastal regions, and in the late 18th cent. Dutch and British captains laid claim to parts of the coast. These claims, however, were disallowed by their governments. In the 18th cent., English missionaries arrived, and they were followed by German missionaries in the 1840s. Britain annexed Walvis Bay in 1878. The Bremen trading firm of F. A. E. Lüderitz gained a cession of land at Angra Pequena (now Lüderitz) in 1883, and in 1884 the German government under Otto von Bismarck proclaimed a protectorate over this area, to which the rest of South West Africa (Ger. *Süd-West Afrika*) was soon added.

Conflicts between the indigenous population and the Europeans, mainly over control of land, led to outbreaks of violence in the 1890s, which worsened in the 1900s. In 1903 the Nama began a revolt, joined by the Herero in 1904. The Germans pursued an brutal military campaign that aimed at dispossessing and exterminating the Herero and Nama. By 1908 it had resulted in the death of about 54,000 Herero (out of a total Herero population of about 70,000), many of whom were driven into the Kalahari Desert, where they perished; 30,000 others also died in the revolt. In 1908 diamonds were discovered near Lüderitz, and a large influx of Europeans began.

During World War I the country was occupied (1915) by South African forces, and after the war South Africa began (1920) to administer it as a C-type mandate under the League of Nations. In 1921–22 the Bondelzwarts, a small Nama group, revolted against South African rule, but they were crushed by South African forces employing airpower. After the founding of the United Nations in 1945, South Africa, unlike the other League of Nations mandatories, refused to surrender its mandate and place South West Africa under the UN trusteeship system.

### *The Struggle for Independence*

In 1960, Ethiopia and Liberia (both of which had been members of the League of Nations) initiated proceedings in the International Court of Justice to have the mandate declared as being in force and to have South Africa charged with failing to fulfill the terms of the mandate. The court ruled in 1966 that Ethiopia and Liberia had not established a legal right or interest entitling them to bring the case. In frustration at this decision, the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), operating in exile, undertook small-scale guerrilla warfare in South West Africa.

The UN General Assembly in 1966 passed a resolution terminating the mandate, and in 1968 it resolved that the country be known as Namibia. The International Court of Justice reaffirmed (1971) the General Assembly's resolution, but the South African government maintained that the United Nations had no authority over South West Africa, and it proceeded with plans for establishing ten African homelands (bantustans) in the country and for tying it more closely to South Africa.

South Africa's attempt to repress political opposition was met with SWAPO's extensive boycott of the bantustan elections in Ovamboland in 1973. South Africa held a constitutional conference (the Turnhalle Conference) in 1975 and delayed deciding Namibia's status. Responding to threats from the world community, the government promised Namibian independence by the end of 1978.

In 1977, the government adopted a new constitution that upheld apartheid policies, restricted SWAPO participation in politics, and sought to continue South African control over foreign affairs after independence. SWAPO and other opposition groups effectively waged guerrilla warfare, gaining control of areas in the north. A UN resolution in 1978 called for a cease-fire and UN-monitored elections. South Africa balked at elections, fearing a SWAPO-led Namibian government.

Under a 1988 agreement brokered by the United States, the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola was linked with the implementation of the UN plan in Namibia. UN-supervised elections were held in 1989; SWAPO won a majority of the parliamentary seats, and party leader Sam Nujoma was elected president. A constitution was adopted in Feb., 1990, and Namibia became independent on Mar. 21, 1990. The important deepwater port of Walvis Bay, to which South Africa had continued to lay claim, was yielded to Namibia in 1994. In the 1994 elections, SWAPO again won a majority and Nujoma was reelected. A land reform program began in 1996 but proceeded slowly; in 2004 the government began expropriating white-owned farms to accelerate the process of resettlement. In the late 1990s Namibia supplied military aid to President Laurent Kabila of the Congo, who was fighting rebel forces seeking to overthrow him.

President Nujoma was reelected again in 1999, following a constitutional change that permitted him to run for a third term. Suggestions in 2004 that another amendment be made to permit a fourth term proved potentially polarizing within both the ruling party and the nation, but in Apr., 2004, Nujoma announced that he would step down at the end of his third term. In Nov., 2004, Hifikepunye Pohamba,

the SWAPO candidate and Nujoma's handpicked successor, was elected president in a landslide, and succeeded him in the post in Mar., 2005. SWAPO also retained a two-thirds majority of the seats in the parliament.

An outbreak of polio in 2006 that resulted in more than 100 cases led to a mass immunization program throughout the country in June and July. Namibia has a significant AIDS problem, with more than 40% of the population infected in some northern areas. In Sept., 2006, the government declared the revived United Democratic party, a group advocating independence for the Caprivi Strip through peaceful means, illegal for secessionist activities. Pohamba was reelected by a large margin in Dec., 2009, and SWAPO again dominated the parliamentary elections. SWAPO remained in power after the Nov., 2014, elections, again easily winning control of parliament and the presidency; Hage Geingob, the prime minister, was elected to succeed Pohamba.

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