

## REVIEW

*40 Years of Democracy in Botswana 1965-2005*

Zibani Maundeni (ed.)

Gaborone: Mmegi Publishing House 2005, 244 pages

Democracy is a topical issue among scholars, non-scholars and the international donor community. This is especially so in Africa, where it has had a chequered history, with very few long-established and stable democracies and a high demand to safeguard and consolidate the new-wave democracies.

The fact that democracy is almost universal as a political system of governance places it at the top of the research agenda and because of its international reputation as one of the pioneers of democracy in Africa Botswana has been subjected to scrutiny to gauge whether the country has consistently maintained its status and whether its achievements can be emulated by other African states. This book celebrates Botswana's 40 years of democracy and also makes a valuable and important contribution to the literature, especially that relating to the problem of democratic consolidation.

A multi-authored book, it is enriched by the contributions of different scholars and the wide range of issues that highlight the nature, challenges, shortcoming and future prospects of Botswana's democracy. The book is divided into three sections, the first two with four chapters each, the third with six.

In chapter 1, entitled 'Botswana's democracy in a southern African regional perspective: progress or decline?', Patrick Molutsi starts by identifying the four pillars of democracy. He then goes on to analyse and compare the performance of Botswana's democratic government with others in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), using two dimensions of democracy, namely intrinsic (political) and instrumental (economic). He concludes that while Botswana has registered achievements in both the political and the economic domain, overall, its performance is no different from those of other countries in the region in the areas of employment creation, foreign direct investment and poverty alleviation. He bemoans the fact that Botswana has failed to provide leadership in the region and has been surpassed by emergent democracies in Namibia and South Africa in terms of the proportional representation (PR) electoral system and constitution building.

Chapter 2, 'Electoral systems and democracy in Botswana', by Mpho Molomo, outlines and compares different electoral systems, namely the first-past-the-post (FPTP), proportional representation (PR) and mixed member proportionality (MMP) systems, setting out the advantages and disadvantages

of each. He supports the adoption of the MMP system in place of the current exclusionary FPTP because of its inclusive nature.

In chapter 3, titled 'The organization of elections and institutional reforms', Mogopodi Lekorwe and Onkemetse Tshosa analyse the administration of elections, focusing on free and fair elections. The chapter traces the evolution of election administration from the Permanent Secretary, Supervisor of Elections to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). It observes that while elections have been free, their fairness remains problematic in spite of some electoral reforms. Outstanding issues include distorted delimitation of constituencies and the lack of independence of the IEC.

David Sebudubudu in chapter 4, 'Transparency and settling of disputes in the Botswana electoral system', examines the important role of election observers and monitors in bestowing credibility and legitimacy on the electoral process to promote free and fair elections. While acknowledging their role, especially that of the internationally famous ones such as the Commonwealth, the European Union and the Carter Center, he also points to their limitations. In addition, he analyses the role of the court system in settling electoral disputes. He maintains that the only drawback of the courts as dispute settlement mechanisms is the enormous cost.

Section two begins with chapter 5, 'Succession to high office: Tswana culture and modern Botswana politics'. In this chapter Zibani Maundeni situates continuity in the modern political system with respect to the election and automatic succession of the top leadership, such as the president and vice-president, within the rules of the traditional Tswana political system. This system has fostered the peaceful transfer of power in the government and the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) but denies the masses participation in choosing the leadership. However, non-adherence by opposition parties to the Tswana succession rule has bred instability, which has resulted in splinter parties.

Chapter 6, 'Voters and electoral performance of political parties in Botswana', by Mpho Molomo and Wilford Molefe, analyses the electoral performance of political parties and the role of the electorate in the promotion of democracy. It explains and bemoans the declining voter turnout and the contradictions of the predominance of the ruling BDP, which wins majority seats in Parliament with less voter support, while the opposition, over time, has garnered fewer seats, with increasing popular support.

In chapter 7, 'Organisation of political parties', Lekorwe discusses the functions of Botswana's political parties, including input, interest aggregation, integration, socialisation and mobilisation of voters. The author shows that there is more internal democracy in the opposition Botswana National Front than in the ruling BDP because of the predominant role of top party structures in the

selection of candidates in the latter and regulated competition in the former, which relies on membership participation and open contests for positions.

Mpho Molomo and David Sebudubudu in chapter 8, 'Funding of political parties: leveling the political playing field', tackle the issue of party funding, which is seen as critical to equalising political competition as opposition parties have inadequate resources. They identify several sources of funds; public, private, external, and the Democracy Fund. They see public funding for parties as one of the important reforms necessary if Botswana is to enhance democracy.

In section three, chapter 9, 'Civil society and voter education in Botswana: 1965-2004', Adam Mfundisi illustrates the importance to voter education of the participation of civil society to increase the number of people participating in elections, thereby reducing voter apathy. Critical to voter education are such organisations as the media and churches, working in conjunction with the IEC. He proposes the introduction of civic education at primary and secondary school levels.

In chapter 10, 'Civil society and democracy in Botswana', Zibani Maundeni disputes the commonly held view that civil society in the country is weak. To support his stand he presents case studies of Ditshwanelo, the Botswana Youth Council, the Teachers' Association and the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organizations, showing their contribution to the democratisation process using non-confrontational tactics.

Dolly Ntseane and Joel Sentsho, in chapter 11, 'Women's representation in parliament and council: a comparative analysis', discuss the unequal gender representation in Parliament and council, in spite of national, regional and international strategies to promote equality. The decline in women's representation in politics is attributed to a number of factors, namely inadequate resources, an absence of appreciation of women's capabilities, and a lack of party commitment to and training for women candidates.

Chapter 12, 'Youth and electoral participation in Botswana', by Tidimane Tsabane, shows that the youth exhibit low levels of participation in the electoral process in spite of their large numbers as a proportion of the population. He identifies traditional culture as the cause of apathy among the youth and argues for socialising agents to inculcate a participatory culture.

In chapter 13, 'Women in party politics', Dolly Ntseane traces the development of the women's movement since independence, focusing on the efforts of Emang Basadi and the Botswana Caucus for Women in Politics' (BCWP) to promote the political rights of women. A special achievement is the women's manifesto sold to political parties. However, numerous obstacles hamper the progress of the BCWP such as party leaders' reluctance to allow their members to join the organisation, party politics, lack of good governance within the

movement, the suspicion of male politicians, limited capacity and the unwillingness of rural women to join the movement. Ntseane also identifies the challenges women politicians face in Botswana. These include socio-cultural factors and lack of education and information. In this respect, she recommends legal reform, education, lobbying, and economic empowerment, among other things, to overcome the challenges.

In chapter 14, 'Conclusion: re-considering democracy in the southern African region', Zibani Maundeni pulls together the arguments covered in the chapters, contesting some of those relating to the negative consequences of the FPTP electoral system, the calls for the PR system, party funding, the unimpressive performance of Botswana's democracy and the prospects of the opposition taking over power.

While taking cognisance of the fact that the book reflects the authors' research preferences and their desire to isolate the shortcomings and future prospects of Botswana's democracy, I must point out some gaps and develop my arguments to augment the discussions in the book. Gaps are natural to any undertaking, even in well-written chapters, especially when the topic under discussion is democracy, which is very broad.

The most significant gap is the absence of a conceptual or theoretical framework of democracy that includes definition, typology and process. The conceptual framework could serve as the first or introductory chapter to guide the flow of discussion of the chapters. The conceptual framework could then be used to gauge the perceived shortcomings, challenges, and prospects for consolidation which are the preoccupation of the contributors.

Democracy as a process can be incremental, incomplete, or prone to reversals. In this respect, theory could be matched with actual democracy in Botswana. Conceptual and theoretical clarification of democracy and its consolidation process becomes critical in view of the controversies associated with different definitions, types and conceptions of democratic enhancement.

The idea of democracy has changed over time and has been reconceptualised in both analytical and concrete terms. The definition of democracy that emphasises alternation in power has prompted Przeworski et al (2002) to disqualify Botswana as a democracy because there has been no alternation of power. Equally, using Huntington's definition of the second election turnover test, Bratton (1998) remarks that in countries where the incumbent party retains power it is hard to judge the extent to which elections contribute to consolidation of democracy, and whether a smooth transfer of power would take place if the opposition were to win an election. However, it might be feasible that Botswana's democracy is unique as it mixes Tswana culture with elements of liberal democracy. Furthermore, a theoretical discussion of democracy is also important, in my view, as the book serves as an academic text.

Save for Patrick Molutsi's chapter, the book focuses heavily on electoral democracy, to the exclusion of other aspects of democracy, such as institutional, which are necessary for a balanced view and holistic picture of democracy in Botswana. Apart from a very brief discussion by Mpho Molomo, there is no analysis of Botswana's parliamentary democracy – one of very few on the continent.

Although Botswana is categorised as a parliamentary democracy it does not have a pure parliamentary system but a mix of parliamentary and presidential elements 'in which the president occupies the dominant power position' (Holm 1996, p 101). Shugart & Casey's (1992, p 24) hybrid of president-parliamentary system encapsulates all but one of the features of Botswana's system of government because its president is indirectly elected by Parliament. Three other features of their hybrid cover the executive-legislature relationship in Botswana – the appointment and dismissal by the president of Cabinet ministers, the subjection of ministers to parliamentary confidence, and the president's power to dissolve the legislature. Parliament is constitutionally sovereign and is therefore expected to check the executive to ensure that it is accountable to the citizens. It can pass a vote of no confidence in the Cabinet, of which the president is part. In reality, the Cabinet and bureaucracy occupy stronger positions than Parliament (Holm 1996; Wallis 1989).

The title of the book deludes one into expecting a discussion of the evolution of Botswana's democracy in the past 40 years. Both the title and Botswana's international reputation demand that some concerted effort be devoted to explaining the uniqueness and longevity of the country's democracy by highlighting the positive aspects and the fact that the past informs both the present and the future.

Patrick Molutsi's assertion of Botswana's failure to provide leadership in championing democracy in the region brings in the issue of Botswana's foreign policy. I would argue that the reluctance could be the result of a pragmatic foreign policy and the realisation of the limitations of its size, as well as an appreciation of the costs of leadership. Botswana has chosen instead to focus on a small regional grouping, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), concentrating on economic matters rather than democracy by spearheading the renegotiation of the SACU agreement.

The recommendations on party funding and electoral reform are informed by experience within the region which suggests that funding has neither prevented the emergence of the dominant party system nor greatly advantaged opposition parties. In South Africa, which has party funding, and Zambia, which does not, the outcome for the opposition is the same. This indicates that there is more to opposition incapacity than state funding of parties or the electoral system.

Literature suggests that the weakness of the opposition in Africa, Botswana included, is the result of a combination of factors, some of which are internal to opposition parties. Fragmentation, factionalism, organisational incapacity, mobilisation deficiencies and inadequate and unskilled human resources confound the political opposition as much as do the predominance of the ruling party and government. Similarly, the transfer of power from the ruling to the opposition party in Zambia in 1991 and Malawi in 1994 indicates that the FPTP system does not preclude a change of government as long as the opposition secures strong electoral support.

Because Botswana has a long tradition of transparent and credible multiparty elections, internal and external election observers and monitors were, for some time, not believed to be necessary. This accounts for the late introduction and limited number of observers and monitors. The relatively limited amount of controversy over the electoral process suggests that the election administration facilitates free and fair elections. Large contingents of observers and monitors are common to new democracies, such as Zambia, which are characterised by suspicion, mistrust and violence.

Contributors share the belief that there are shortcomings in Botswana's democracy and Mpho Molomo goes to the extent of suggesting that the 2009 election might trigger a crisis similar to that in Lesotho if the country does not change to the MMP or PR. I would argue, more along the line of Zibani Maundeni's argument on tolerance, that the Botswana government's ability to accommodate suggestions from the opposition parties, as in the case of the creation of the Independent Electoral Commission; the reduction of the voting age from 21 to 18; the provision of absentee ballots; and its willingness to adapt to changing circumstances would forestall Molomo's gloom and doom. The government has shown leadership and political will and more recently, in 2006, has alluded to the possibility of accommodating demands for electoral reform if it is in the national interest.

The situation of women and youth reflects a clash of Western (human rights) and African cultural values (sexual and role differentiation). Patriarchal culture remains the most significant hindrance to the participation of women and youth in African politics. The biggest problem, however, is how to ameliorate the negative effects of patriarchy, since culture is not readily amenable to change. Thus, for example, as in Mozambique and South Africa, it is the patriarchal state, specifically the willingness of the male president to accommodate women, not merely the PR system, that has enabled increased representation of women. Women's wings of political parties confirm the marginal position of women within party structures. The tendency of parties to let women compete against each other during party primaries and parliamentary elections fosters division and goes



against the spirit of sisterhood which is critical to the unity necessary to fight the challenges facing all women politicians. The proposal of affirmative action biased towards women appears to be losing credibility internationally with the move to competitiveness and achievement oriented norms. The intensification of political competition for positions lessens the chances of preferential treatment for females.

Zibani Maundeni's assertion that Botswana's civil society is not weak reflects, I would argue, the small number of case studies selected; the growth and better organisation of some associations; the emergence of more burning issues that need to be addressed, such as human rights in relation to *Ditswanelo*; and the rise of relatively new and vibrant associations like the Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC). This leads to the question of why old associations such as trades (workers') unions representing important sectors of the economy struggle to influence policy on employment and privatisation, and to push for interest group politics to take root in Africa's oldest democracy.

Dolly Ntseane's chapter shows that the women's associations are not as strong as Zibani Maundeni would like us to believe and have accomplished only a limited amount in the promotion of women's political rights in spite of their lobbying efforts. Generally, women's associations lack the political clout to influence the political system to champion gender equality.

The emphasis on (electoral) democracy, primarily participation and fairness, raises the question of how to achieve the desired goal of democratic enhancement in Botswana. Some authors have made proposals in this regard. However, change depends on the benefits and costs and should be in accordance with internal needs, which have to be balanced by regional and international developments, for example, the trend towards PR electoral system or public funding for political parties. It is therefore necessary to know society's views on reforms relating to the electoral system, the election of the president, gender equality, and youth participation. Beyond that, the question is: are social groups able to initiate and sustain pressure for democratic reform in Botswana? Kasfir (1998) suggests that prospects for democratic consolidation are partly shaped by civil society. Civil society, as currently constituted in Botswana, is not as vibrant as Kasfir demands.

The book's preoccupation with change, I would argue, brings to the fore the question of whether change should be propelled endogenously, by the internal needs of the system or exogenously, through regional or global trends. This raises the question of whether one of the two should take precedence or how to reconcile or balance them. Yet, it could also be a question of 'As good as it gets', as Ian Taylor (2003) puts it, suggesting that the current level of democracy is the best the country can attain.

The numerous and interrelated proposed reforms suggested, relating to, among others, economic performance, the electoral system, participation of

women and youth, internal party democracy, election of leaders, voter education, and party funding, are useful, but raise the problem of how to prioritise and implement them. The implication is that there is a need for further research and collaborative interaction between civil society and the state as democratic consolidation is a long-drawn-out process. The book lays the foundation and points to the numerous gaps and issues that need attention to further improve and consolidate Botswana's democracy.

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