

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND VOTING PATTERNS IN BOTSWANA

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ABSTRACT

Civic participation is a broad and far-reaching concept that means different things to different people and in different contexts. Botswana is highly regarded in Africa and the world as a model of democracy and good governance, a regard that is associated with the liberal democratic credentials of the country and with regular elections, which have been declared by commentators and observers to be 'free and fair'. However, despite the accolades bestowed on Botswana, civic participation in the political affairs of the country has been poor. There has been low voter turnout in most general elections since independence in 1965 and there has been a downward trend in civic engagement. This calls into question the much-celebrated democratic credentials of the country.

INTRODUCTION

Botswana is internationally acclaimed as a country that promotes democratic values and was perceived during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s as a haven of peace, tranquillity and good governance at a time when Southern Africa was in turmoil because of the repressive minority regimes in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. But since the independence of these countries, particularly Namibia and Zimbabwe, some writers and commentators have called into question the much-celebrated democracy in Botswana. Cracks began to emerge as Namibia and South Africa introduced far-reaching socio-economic and political reforms that advanced democracy to greater heights.

Although the Constitution of Botswana provides for universal suffrage and direct elections by secret ballot every five years, the numbers of people who register and cast valid votes has declined over the years. In 1965, 75 per cent of registered voters went to the polls to elect the government of their choice, but in the next election, in 1969, only about 55 per cent did so.

This paper analyses developments in Botswana in terms of both civic participation and voting patterns since the 1965 election. It draws a distinction between voter participation and civic participation, the latter being broader and more comprehensive. In addition it discusses the reasons for and causes of the lack of civic participation. It also undertakes an in-depth assessment of the efforts by government, election management authorities, and civil society to educate citizens and voters about the importance in a democratic society of participating in all levels of governance. Finally, the paper examines the attempts by different organisations to motivate people to register and vote and the challenges they face in doing so.

The relatively poor voter turnout in Botswana's first democratic election was understandable given many centuries of chieftainship and colonial administration, none of which promoted democracy in the country. But this poor level of participation has continued unabated since then. There are different explanations for citizens' disengagement from the political landscape. Firstly, the outcome was a foregone conclusion and people felt their votes would not matter so there was no need to participate.

Secondly, voters were content with the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and its charismatic leader, Sir Seretse Khama. Thirdly, the ruling party intimated that any challenge to it amounted to subversion and a threat to democratic values, thus alienating many citizens, who felt that politics was a dirty game.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH VOTING

While the election process is a necessary instrument, it should be supplemented by other forms of civic participation. Direct democratic avenues have to be exploited to enrich a democratic system of government.

All eligible voters, irrespective of gender, race, socio-economic status, and political affiliation are constitutionally empowered to participate, but since the onus is on voters to register in order to do so the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the government have a responsibility to encourage voter participation and spearhead voter education. The future health of Botswana's democratic governance lies in a large number of eligible voters actively participating in the election process.

In order to make informed decisions, however, voters must be aware of the purpose of elections, of their voting rights and obligations, and of the range of electoral procedures and options. If the electorate is ignorant of the election process voter apathy is pronounced, large numbers of spoilt ballots become the norm, a lack of confidence creeps in, and the integrity of the electoral process becomes questionable. In the end, the results of the elections are placed in doubt and the stability of a country may be endangered.

With a general election set for 2009 there is concern in Botswana about both voter apathy and the alienation of the electorate from the political process, but political disenchantment is not a new phenomenon. The first time Botswana citizens aged between 18 and 20 were allowed to vote was in the 1999 election and people in that age group were expected to register in large numbers. In fact few did – the decades of disenfranchisement had alienated young people from both the political and the social life of the country. Young people are victims of social and economic problems such as unemployment and neglect by parents and society at large and the lack of active civic participation cuts across all socio-economic groups.

Political participation in elections is a hallmark of a vibrant democracy and good governance. A strong democratic government is dependent on the active participation of citizens in structures, institutions and operations of communities and government. A 2002 report of the Democracy Research Project of the University of Botswana concluded that there was a high level of voter apathy in Botswana's political life. Declining participation in civil society activities and government is a worrying phenomenon. There is a growing need to engage apathetic and disempowered groups of voters to encourage greater participation in the electoral process. Voter turnout at election times is an indication of the ability of government, electoral management body, and civil society to motivate eligible voters to register and cast valid votes.

It is evident from Table 1 that voting patterns have fluctuated over the years, with the lowest turnout (31%) in 1974. One possible reason for this dismal figure is that during this period the government of Botswana introduced an aggressive land policy, the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP), in which it demarcated large chunks of land for distribution to farmers. As a result, cattle barons acquired large farms to the detriment of the small landowners and used both their commercial and freehold farms for grazing, thereby competing with the small farmers. Government failed to take any action to normalise the situation and the low voter turnout was a sign of discontent and cynicism about government institutions.

The declining numbers of people exercising their democratic right to vote is a worry for the government, the IEC and the democratic fraternity at large.

Table 1
Voter Turnout in the Botswana General Elections
1965-2004

Year	Voting population	Registered voters	Votes cast	Percentage vote
1965	243 365	188 950	140 789	75
1969	267 647	156 428	85 879	55
1974	309 810	236 483	73 897	31
1979	362 515	243 483	142 245	58
1984	416 996	293 571	227 756	78
1989	507 569	367 069	250 487	68
1994	609 000	370 356	281 931	77
1999	800 000	459 251	330 779	77
2004	900 000	552 849	421 272	76

Source: Modified from *Report to the Vice-President and Minister of Presidential Affairs & Public Administration on the General Elections 1999*. Appendix L

Elections are an important barometer of popular participation in a representative democracy. By exercising their right to vote citizens give legitimacy and credibility to the electoral process and when they disengage from it representative democracy might be under threat.

The 1999 general election showed that young voters exhibit the same apathy as their elders with fewer than 5 per cent of 18-to 20-year-olds casting their votes in that election.

If the voting-age population is taken into consideration rather than merely the number of registered voters, Table 1 in fact overstates the percentage who voted in the 1999 election – on that basis the poll attracted only 41 per cent of potential voters. Subsequent by-elections attracted even fewer registered voters and only 2, 6 per cent of registered voters participated in a referendum in 2001 on the extension of the retirement age of judges.

REASONS FOR POOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

There is little consensus about the reasons for voter apathy in Botswana. Apathy should be analysed against the background of illiteracy, socio-economic factors,

and the absence of democracy during the colonial era, the lack of voter and civic education, and politicians who cannot be held to account.

The Democracy Research Project (DRP) of the University of Botswana has attributed the steadily declining voter turnout to several factors. Firstly, historical circumstances militate against a massive turnout. The public forums, '*Dikgotla*', dominated as they are by tribal chiefs, who are not elected but inherit their positions, are not effective places in which to engender participation by all age groups. Another group that aligns with the chiefs to stifle participation is the chiefs' advisors – the elderly and conservative elements of society. The youth, women and marginalised tribal groups are prevented from participating actively in decision-making.

Secondly, political activism is largely a post-colonial activity. During the colonial period there was no culture of competitive elections for leaders.

A third reason for low voter turnout is a system that excludes the highest office of governance from direct elections. This appears to de-motivate a large section of the population. The 2002 DRP research showed that the majority of Botswana's population proposed direct elections for the office of the presidency. It is further argued that, because the Constitution gives the president wide and extensive executive powers, it is imperative, in the interests of enhancing democracy and good governance, that the position is contested.

Fourthly, voters disengage from the political process because, for the past 40 years, one party has held power in the country. The Botswana Democratic Party has been in power since the first democratic elections in 1965 and the lack of competition is a disincentive to voters. The BDP has massive resources, stemming from big business within the country. In 1999 it received a donation amounting to P5-million from a covert source outside the country, alleged by some commentators to be the De Beers Mining Company, which dominates diamond mining in Botswana. The political playing field is very uneven and this is exacerbated by the BDP government's reluctance to adopt the idea of sponsoring political parties.

The poor state of Botswana's opposition parties adds to the woes of the electorate. Fragmentation of the opposition has led to the continued domination of the BDP and to cynicism and disappointment among a substantial section of the country's citizens.

The weaknesses of political parties in Botswana must be taken into account in any analysis of voter disengagement from the political process. Botswana's political parties tend to have authoritarian leadership, structures, and procedures (Neocosmos, 2002). The behaviour, attitudes, and activities of party leaders have led to them being perceived as untrustworthy, making promises they do not keep. Hence potential voters shun the elections. Another accusation levelled against

politicians and government institutions is that they serve their own interests at the expense of those of the public.

The ascendance to political office in Botswana is perceived as a route to enrichment and self-aggrandisement. In addition, political parties field uninspiring candidates, who fail ultimately to stimulate voters' interest or excitement. Weak candidates who are unable to attract more supporters are another impediment to the participation of large numbers of voters. Political party campaigns are often abusive and negative and rarely based on substantive issues. In addition, poverty and deprivation are major issues in the country, with national resources concentrated in a few hands, so there is affluence in the midst of poverty and deprivation.

Another reason for poor participation in Botswana's political process is the registration process, which demands that eligible voters initiate registration. For a citizen to qualify for registration, she or he must fulfil certain requirements, relating, among other things, to age, citizenship, mental status, and criminal record. A number of eligible citizens are disenfranchised by the rigid electoral process; some because at the time of registration they do not have identity documents and some, who are migrant workers, because they are not at their place of abode. In addition, the electoral law limits the length of time the polls are open to 6.30am to 7pm on election day. In urban centres, some eligible voters work long hours far from their places of residence and may not have adequate time to cast their ballot. Others are mobile officers who, at the time of the election, may be away from their registration point and are therefore disenfranchised.

It is clear from the above that there is a need to reform the electoral system and parliamentary institutions in order to restore confidence and integrity to the political system and to motivate more citizens to participate in elections. Under Botswana's first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, election outcomes do not accurately reflect voter preferences except in a two-person race.

An example is the 1999 general election where the ruling BDP received 54 per cent of the vote but that was translated into 83 per cent of the parliamentary seats while the Botswana National Party (BNP) won 25 per cent but only 15 per cent of the seats and the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) won 11 per cent of the total votes but received only 2 per cent of the seats. To all intents and purposes, this type of system distorts the interests and aspirations of voters, leading to disengagement from the political process. Distortions caused by the FPTP system reduce voter choices, making many feel their vote will be wasted because they are casting it for a losing candidate.

Low levels of civic participation cannot be ignored any longer in a country that prides itself on upholding liberal democratic values. The Botswana

government has an obligation to improve voter turnout in elections because the legitimacy of the government is derived from substantial citizen participation in political activities. The government has entrusted the Independent Electoral Commission with voter education with the aim of arresting apathy and the alienation of voters from the electoral process.

This, in turn, because of the mammoth amount of work entailed in the process of voter education, has led the IEC to turn to civil society organisations to assist it in voter and political education. Voter education is a new phenomenon in Botswana. Before the 1999 election, there was little emphasis on it. More attention was devoted to public information about registration and the voting process.

Low voter turnout must be addressed as a matter of urgency before the 2009 general election if Botswana is to maintain its reputation as a shining example of democracy, good governance, and prudent financial management. The importance of voter education in particular and civic education in general cannot be overemphasised. The outcome of any election has an impact on all citizens of a country, not only in terms of taxation but also in terms of policies and programmes in key areas such as education, health, security, social welfare, environment, and transport. It should be emphasised that increasing voter participation will neither be easy nor attained over night. The solution will require a broad-based approach and innovative strategies. The reasons for voter apathy are many and varied and there is a need for deeper understanding of the contributing factors and an analysis of possible solutions.

It has been said that: 'A free society must rely on the knowledge, skills, and virtue of its citizens and those they elect to public office' (Centre for Civic Education, p 1). In Botswana there is an apparent lack of investment in preparing eligible voters to register and cast their ballots. Government should be committed to financing programmes that educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities. Voter awareness is important in order to motivate as many eligible voters as possible to be ready, willing and able to participate in the political processes governing the country. The legitimacy of the government in power, as well as the integrity of the electoral process, is at stake if many people shun elections. In addition, representative democracy and the accountability of government officials could be compromised if fewer people participate in the election process. This will inevitably lead to declining engagement of citizens with government and its agencies, leading to people becoming spectators in policy-making in the country.

OTHER FORMS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

There are other forms of direct involvement in public policy, such as joining political parties, pressure and interest groups, and civic activism of various sorts. There

are structures at institutional and local levels which can be used as conduits for active civic participation. One of the oldest and most understood is the *kgotla* system, which is a traditional forum for participation of all citizens in decision-making (Binsbergen 1992; Lekorwe 1998).

The *kgotla* is a forum for decision-making as well as consultation on matters of public interest. Theoretically, party political issues are barred from this august forum but, over the years, ruling party functionaries (president and ministers) have used it to discuss party policies under the guise of national policies. On the eve of every election the president of Botswana, who is also the leader of the BDP, tours constituencies, mostly those where the BDP has little support (*Daily News* 10 October 1969). In his address he concentrates on government policies, past, present and future, and urges people to vote wisely. Moreover, he lectures them on the value of democracy and the importance of citizens voting in responsible leaders to run the country prudently. In some instances, the president will use the *kgotla* to attack the opposition for making promises which cannot be fulfilled (*Daily News* 3 October 1969).

Genuine participation by citizens is subverted by the elite and conservative members of society, who are mostly male. Disadvantaged groups, such as women, youth, the handicapped, and minorities, are marginalised in relation to decision-making. People are not genuinely consulted but are told about policies already decided by government. Their main role is to legitimise such public policy. The *kgotla* system enables the president and his party to manipulate the poor and rural population in order to win votes. Over the years, attendance at *kgotla* meetings has dwindled, except when there are controversial issues to be discussed.

Another forum for political information is the Freedom Square, which can be traced to the early 1960s, when political activity began in Botswana. This forum is used by politicians of different political stripes to woo people to their side. It is supposed to be a two-way process between politicians and the electorate, with politicians communicating their information on policies, programmes, successes and failures, and members of the public expected to ask questions and to comment on the speeches made by the politicians. The Freedom Square platform allows for interaction between political parties and voters, enabling them to exchange ideas and views. One weakness of the Freedom Square as a form of civic participation is that the agenda is set by the parties and they decide who is to participate in the discussions. There is generally a poor turnout at these rallies, frequently with only the converted attending.

Civil society organisations are also important in promoting civic participation in decisions that affect the lives of citizens. Though the IEC has the legal responsibility for and authority over voter education, civil society

organisations can play a significant role. There is an increasing need for government, the IEC, and civil society to discuss voter education. The mobilisation of civil society organisations in an election year is crucial to voter education activities. These organisations have the capacity, skills, resources, and voluntary ethos to be able to reach diverse groups. The IEC should ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development.

Civil society organisations include, among others, campaign networks, teacher organisations, student representative bodies, religious organisations, political parties, youth organisations, women's organisations, trade unions, professional bodies, and social movements. All these bodies are closer to the grassroots, hence are able to transmit effective information to the population scattered across the length and breadth of the country.

A strong or vibrant civil society engaged in a diverse range of public activities is essential for a healthy democracy, allowing Botswana society to articulate its concerns to all levels of government. Civil society organisations can ensure the public accountability of government and its agencies. In addition, they can increase voter awareness of elections and keep political parties focused on the socio-economic and political concerns of citizens.

Civil society in Botswana is weak, with most Batswana participating less in political activities than they once did. There is a particularly notable drop in the membership of political parties and civic organisations. If many people start to leave political life, the basis of representative democracy will be under serious threat.

The political indifference of the youth is a particularly worrying phenomenon. Botswana has a youngish population and there is a need to engage as many young people as possible in the political process. These men and women are the future leaders of the country and should be encouraged to participate actively in the election process. The IEC might strive to reach the youth, who constitute a substantial number of the country's eligible voters and who will be affected most by the socio-economic and political decisions made by the government.

The IEC should collaborate with the Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC) to motivate young voters to participate actively in the election process to lend legitimacy to elections. The BNYC (*The Botswana Reporter Mmegi-Wa-Dikgang* 2003) has conducted series of leadership development workshops throughout the country aimed at empowering young people who are interested in standing for political office in the 2009 general election. This is one way of encouraging the youth to participate in the electoral process as voters as well as candidates.

GENDER AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Another group that must be included in the political development of Botswana is women. There are more women than men in Botswana but that has not been translated into massive women's participation in the leadership of political parties. A traditionally male-dominated culture permeates every facet of life in Botswana and Parliament remains a men's club with the representation of women in the National Assembly standing below 20 per cent. While women in Botswana enjoy the legal right to vote, in reality a web of obstacles – cultural, social, economic, legal and educational – obstructs their participation at all levels of political decision-making. An attempt has to be made remove or reduce these barriers in order to motivate women to participate in all decisions that affect the country in the short, medium, and long term. In essence, women should have access to decision-making and different styles of governance if they are to have an impact on the political development of the country.

The IEC, in partnership with women's organisations such as Emang Basadi, the Women's Coalition, and the Women's Caucus, has undertaken a series of political leadership training programmes for women aspiring to elected office as well as for those already in leadership positions. Currently, Emang Basadi is carrying out voter education by means of debates among candidates of all political parties in various constituencies. This electoral advocacy, in providing a non-partisan forum for candidates to debate issues, helps some candidates who might not have access to media coverage.

These training efforts should increase the number of women who join political parties as well as the number of elected women who assume leadership positions in the legislative and executive branches of government. In addition, we should start to see the proliferation of viable organisations championing women's rights and participation in the election process. Networking among politically active women should be another programme to raise their awareness and active participation in the political process. Knowledge and awareness may lead to increased registration and voter engagement, thereby enhancing democracy. Women political leaders across the party political divides may share their valuable experiences to enhance their decision-making capacity. Through the Botswana Caucus for Women in Politics women of different political stripes have held seminars and workshops aimed at sensitising women politicians on various issues.

THE MASS MEDIA AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The media have an effect upon both the presentation and the outcome of political campaigns and can provide an effective channel for imparting information and

educational messages to a large audience. News reporting can be an asset and, at the same time, a liability, to the electoral process.

As part of its public information programme, the IEC must involve the press, media and wire services and the media must play an active role in informing and motivating people to participate actively in the political process. The mass media must make voters aware of relevant issues and problems, consequences and the costs of present and past policies and options for the future. Educating voters about their inalienable rights and obligations in a representative democracy is an essential component of building a viable and vibrant civil society.

However, in a society that is rural, illiterate, and suffering from acute poverty, deprivation and unemployment, the media may not be able to be effective as disseminators of election materials to the voters. Voter education programmes rely strongly on printed materials – badges, posters, stickers, booklets, banners, comic and picture stories, and clothing items, as well as information centres and innovative advertisements on billboards, at sports facilities and on the sides of buses, taxis and trains. Concerts, plays, dance, street theatre and other forms of artistic and cultural activities should be employed to promote democracy, civic responsibility, and voter education.

Kessel (2000, pp 61-62) has rightly pointed out that ‘media play a role as informers, educators and entertainers of the public. Mass media provide information on public policy issues and provide a platform for discussion. Media help empower their audience by making them aware of their civil and political rights and by explaining how and why these rights should be exercised.’ The media, whether public or private, have a role to play in disseminating information about political parties, candidates, policies, and the electoral processes of a country. This enables voters to make choices when they go to the polls.

Until the 1990s the public broadcasting media were a state monopoly. Radio Botswana has long been the mouthpiece of government and, by extension, the ruling party machinery. The station has the capacity to reach people who cannot be reached physically by the electoral body and its officials and thus plays a critical role in disseminating information to a large audience in most parts of the country. The problem is that, given the fact that it is controlled by the government of the day, Radio Botswana is used as a propaganda tool by the BDP.

However, in the 1990s there was a proliferation of private radio stations in Botswana, mostly concentrated in Gaborone with their coverage limited to Gaborone and the surrounding villages and some of them broadcasting programmes covering civil and political issues. In the countryside Radio Botswana still dominates the political landscape.

As far as the print media are concerned, the government newspaper, *The Daily News*, which is distributed free of charge and thus has an extensive

circulation, was, until the 1980s, the sole paper available to disseminate information to the public until the 1980s. In the 1980s, private newspapers mushroomed, among them *The Botswana Reporter Mmegi- Wa-Dikgang* and *The Botswana Guardian*.

The mass media have their own weaknesses, for example, an inability to reach all parts of the country, an emphasis on negative reporting which discourages readers, and biased reporting. In Botswana the media have done a disservice to large sections of society through various commissions and omissions and news reporting has concentrated on the negative and ignored pertinent issues underlying elections. The government-owned media must be required by law to give fair coverage and equitable access to all competing political parties.

RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Other important civil society organisations that can have a profound impact on voter education are religious institutions, which have a large following in Botswana. While religious groups in many parts of the world have played an important role in voter education, in Botswana they have been slow to participate. It is critical that these bodies become involved in order to make a positive impact on the future of communities and the nation at large.

It is debatable whether political party organisations should be viewed as part of civil society. Some perceive them as outside the realm of civil society because their aim is to seize political power, but some define civil society in broader terms to include them. Political parties are indispensable in bringing voter education to the people as they have the greatest interest in the political contest. They must explain why people should vote, the voting procedures, the secrecy of the ballot, and the general security of elections, and it is in their interests to urge their followers to cast valid ballots. But the ability of political parties to conduct voter education depends on the availability of resources, human as well as financial. In a country like Botswana, political parties do not have adequate resources to carry out the mammoth and daunting task expected of them. Moreover, they are not financed by the state, but have to fend for themselves. In fact, voter education should be carried out by non-partisan organisations. Political parties are more concerned with carrying out programmes that attract more votes for them. They may even be selective, concentrating on the constituencies that are deemed most likely to be supportive.

VOTING PATTERNS

Voting patterns in Botswana are hard to establish because there are limited data from which to make an informed evaluation. As indicated above the turnout in

the historic first general election in 1965 was 75 per cent, which was acceptable taking into consideration the lack of political participation prior to independence. However, if this assertion is correct, the level of voter participation in subsequent elections should have increased but it did not – it fell dramatically in 1969, possibly because many prospective voters considered the result a forgone conclusion.

The 1984 general election attracted a turnout of 78 per cent, the highest recorded in the country's political history. This was considered to be one of the most competitive elections in the country, with the opposition Botswana National Front (BNF) posing a serious challenge to the ruling BDP. The BNF won the highest number of parliamentary seats (13) of any opposition party in Botswana's history, most of them in urban centres – Francistown, Gaborone, Lobatse and Selibe Phikwe. The BNF strongholds in the Southern District were maintained.

The few young people who choose to vote tend to vote for the opposition but this trend might change as the ruling party campaigns vigorously to attract younger voters to its fold. Older voters and those in rural areas appear to vote for the ruling BDP. Women also seem to lean towards the ruling party. Historically, women have always voted for conservative parties which are uninterested in their socio-economic and political development. One possible reason is that women cherish peace and tranquillity, which the BDP is perceived to promote, while the opposition is branded as violent and anti-liberty, which, discourages women from associating with it. Women are also generally illiterate and poor and hence susceptible to manipulation by those in power.

The business community and the cattle barons, who, over the years, have benefited from the economic growth of the country, are the driving force behind the financial and organisational superiority of the BDP and have been since the first general election, while traditionally the workers have always been the cornerstone of opposition politics.

The rural-urban divide seems to be blurred, as evinced by the voting patterns in the 2004 general election when the BDP and the opposition parties made inroads into each other's traditional domain. The BDP managed to win one constituency in Gaborone, the heartland of opposition politics, as well as to cling to all its constituencies in Francistown and Selibe Phikwe. Opposition parties prevented themselves from winning most urban constituencies by splitting the vote – the combined number of votes for the opposition in most urban constituencies far outstripped that for the BDP.

Ethnicity is another major factor in the politics of Botswana that is ignored by many observers of the country's political scene. Tribal inclinations have played a vital role in the political dynamics of the country since the 1996 election (Holm & Molutsi 1988). The BDP is supported by the eight so-called principal tribes, excluding the Bakgatla in Mochudi and environs, who vacillate between the ruling

party and opposition parties, influenced by their outspoken chief, Linchwe, who initially considered the BDP an anti-traditional party. To date the BDP has had absolute support from the Central (Bangwato) and Kweneng (Bakwena) districts. The Bangwaketse parted with the ruling party in 1969 when their chief resigned from his chieftainship and joined the BNF (Holm & Molutsi 1988). Chief Bathoen Gaseitsiwe beat the then vice-president, Ketumile Masire, by a wide margin in spite of a BDP-inspired campaign spearheaded by President Khama. Since then, the BNF has had the Ngwaketse area as its traditional political base. The Botswana People's Party (BPP) had support in the northern part of the country around Francistown and in the north east. These areas were dominated by Bakalanga, who aligned himself with Phillip Matante and won seats there until the 1980s when the BDP used multifaceted strategies to dislodge the weakened BPP. The Botswana Independence Party (BIP), led by Motsamai Mpho, had a large following in the Okavango area, where the Bayei are concentrated.

BDP victories are assured by Botswana's stable economic and social development (Binsbergen 1992). Proceeds from diamonds and other revenue sources have been used to build schools, health facilities, roads and offices, which are used as campaigning projects or programmes. Foreign reserves have been accrued for use in difficult years and this policy has earned Botswana a good name in the international arena.

Historically, the BDP has used the resources of the country to perpetuate its dominance and superiority, as evidenced by pre-election manoeuvres like salary hikes and development projects. In 1974 the BDP increased the salaries of public servants and introduced an Accelerated Rural Development Programme to woo rural voters to cast ballots in its favour (Parsons 1977; Colclough & McCarthy 1980; Danevad 1995). It also purchased land from the Tati Company in Francistown for distribution to residents; a ploy that worked – the party eventually captured Francistown.

CHALLENGES TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN BOTSWANA

From the above it is clear that there are manifold opportunities and challenges facing government, political parties, the Independent Electoral Commission, and civil society in relation to combating voter apathy, which is inimical to democracy and good governance. Poverty and deprivation in the midst of plenty must be addressed by both the government and civil society if voter alienation is to be tackled. A state of helplessness and dependency on handouts from government and NGOs must be address as a matter of urgency. Moreover, the gap between the haves and the have-nots that has been widening for decades must be acknowledged and addressed.

The government, the IEC, and civil society organisations should endeavour to inculcate in the general population a civic education culture in order to foster democratic values and ethics in the country. Voter education should be supplemented and complemented by other interventions in the body politic. All these strategies should ensure large-scale participation by citizens in the electoral process. Civic education programmes should be demographically specific, taking into consideration the unique characteristics of the local population – language, custom, tradition, beliefs, literacy and economic and social status. The media should be used extensively to encourage voter participation. In addition there is a need to advertise the election and make available voting materials for demonstration at civic gatherings, local churches, mosques, and synagogues, post offices, libraries, and government offices.

Potential voters can be targeted through specially designed information and education campaigns that include advertisements, pamphlets, radio and television programmes, public rallies, and information displays in public places. Registration facilities should be provided in places frequented by members of the public, for example, clinics, schools, public fora (*kgotla*), and post offices. Registration reforms must be undertaken to make it easier for potential voters to enlist to qualify to vote in elections. All barriers to registration must be eliminated or reduced to ensure widespread participation by eligible voters. Currently there are a number of obstacles in the registration process, for example, registration requirements, residence, and non-permanent voters' roll, and citizenship.

There is a need for continuous voter and civic education between general elections in order to cultivate awareness among the general population of the essence of democratic participation in every facet of their lives. Voter education targets eligible voters by giving them information on electoral laws, electioneering, registration requirements, rights and obligations, the voting process, counting, and announcement of results. Civic education, on the other hand, deals with broader issues of loyalty, patriotism and the rights and obligations of citizens.

CONCLUSION

Although elections in Botswana have been declared to be 'free and fair', some commentators have questioned the disproportionate media coverage for the ruling BDP and the uneven political playing fields. The BDP has ample resources, which it uses effectively to win voters to its side. The resources of all the opposition parties combined do not match those of the BDP as the latter has the support of the business community both within and outside Botswana.

A healthy democracy should pride itself on active civic engagement in all facets of public life. Citizens should play an active role in all the socio-economic

and political structures and institutions available in the country. Since the dawn of Botswana's independence in 1966, civic participation has declined steadily in both the political and social spheres. Political participation started at an acceptable level, bearing in mind the many centuries of authoritarian socio-political regimes, but it has declined since then. On the social front, an initial zeal for community involvement has evaporated and fewer Botswana are members of interest/pressure groups through which they can collectively influence public policy.

A great deal must be done by both government and civil society to resuscitate the spirit of voluntarism and membership of community associations in order to promote an active citizenry. The Botswana government should entrust the IEC with the conduct of voter education and should finance civic education programmes to educate citizens about the efficacy of participation in elections. Furthermore, government should reform the electoral laws to make them more progressive and facilitative of civic participation in public life.

Civil society should take its rightful place in engineering the active participation of citizens in all spheres of life. The introduction of civic education into the national curriculum of primary and secondary schools is long overdue in Botswana. The country must instil a concept of civic responsibility at a tender age in order to enhance popular participation in the political process in the long run. In addition to civic education, voter education programmes would contribute to specific issues pertaining to the electoral process. There should be thorough implementation and evaluation of voter education programmes. Moreover, adequate planning for and funding of voter education activities are important to the achievement of voter awareness and participation in the electoral process.

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