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Political Parties

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This chapter discusses the national integrity system of political parties. In assessing the viability and integrity of political parties, the purpose of their existence needs to be established and analysed. The building and institutionalisation of political parties is a basic prerequisite for deepening and consolidating democracy.¹ However, the organisational structures and the resources at the disposal of political parties influence their effectiveness. In addition, as entities that make national laws within the framework of parliamentary democracy, political parties must conduct themselves in an open and ethical manner. This chapter will assess their integrity, the handling of conflict of interest, and their perception regarding rules of disclosure.

1 Linz, J. and A. Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. These authors define a consolidated democracy as 'a political regime in which democracy as a complex set of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives have become, in a phrase, "the only game in town." Democracy is consolidating if the processes of electing leaders into office and holding them accountable are widely accepted by the populace, and are taken as the norm for regime change. More substantively, it entails the establishment of an institutional framework for facilitating free and fair elections, the separation of powers, and effective oversight of democratic procedures to ensure transparency and accountability.' 15.

Formation and role

When political parties evolved in the late 1950s and the 1960s they were agents of decolonisation and political emancipation. With the advent of the post-colonial state, political parties have been transformed to be agents of political mobilisation and democratic development. However, in addition to being agents for political recruitment and training of political leadership, they are also an important link between government and the people. They perform a number of important functions, such as aggregating diverse interests and articulating them into coherent political demands in the political system.

It is widely accepted that strong and functioning political parties are the lifeblood of liberal democracy; without them democracy cannot exist. Nevertheless, democracy is a much more substantive process than a mere plurality of political parties. Since it is no longer possible to practice direct democracy, as was the case with the ancient Greek states, democracy now takes the form of representative government. In this regard, political parties play an important part in articulating the various ideological and policy positions. They provide an avenue for the electorate to participate in the decision-making process of government. They assist the electorate to exercise their democratic right of free choice.

In a democracy, political parties are institutions through which people express their political preferences. Where there is general disinterest in party politics, people do not vote in large numbers and that would be an important indicator of a malfunctioning national integrity system. As political parties campaign and mobilise the electorate, they stand a chance of being better known, appreciated and supported by the populace. As a result, political parties with coherent manifestos and effective campaign strategies are in a better position to command a lot of political support.

Botswana operates a multi-party democracy with ten registered political parties. These are Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM), Botswana Congress Party (BCP), Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), Botswana National Front (BNF), Movement for Marx, Engels and Stalin (MELS), New Democratic Front (NDF), United Socialist Party (PUSO), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Botswana Progressive Union (BPU), Botswana Workers Front (BWF) and Botswana Labour Party (BLP). At face value, judging from the number of registered political parties, one can conclude that Botswana is a multi-party democracy.

Yet, based on the strength of these parties and their chances of winning elections, Botswana is best characterised as a predominant party system. A predominant party system² is a situation where, although the Constitution and electoral law provides for a multi-party system, only one political party has won all the elections: The BDP has won all of them since the independence elections of 1965. A corollary of this is that opposition parties are fractured

2 This state of affairs is not an exception to Botswana, having occurred in other established democracies such as Japan and Sweden. The issue is that it needs to be problematised to explain why it has occurred.

and polarised, and are unable to unseat the incumbent party from government. In such a state of affairs, the electoral competition remains skewed, symbolic and ineffective in delivering an alternative government.

Structure and resources

Political parties in Botswana have well defined structures and institutions, and although they manifest slight differences; their structures are almost the same. The structures include structures at national,³ regional,⁴ constituency,⁵ ward⁶ and cell level. The National Congress is the supreme organ, which elects the central committee and has the ultimate authority to reverse any decisions made by any structure of the party. National Congresses evaluate the work of the central committee and the policy direction of the party. All other structures of the party are accountable to the National Congress. It is convened every three years provided it does not coincide with an election year.

The central committees⁷ are mandated to provide overall leadership to the party; ensure that other organs of the parties are functioning well; disburse personnel and funds; take disciplinary action against party members who flaunt procedures, and also oversee the administration of primary elections. In contrast, the national conference, which meets yearly, receives reports from regions and deliberates on motions tabled before it. Responsibilities cascade from the national to regional levels, from regional to constituency, and from constituency to ward and cell levels. Ideally the structures should be seen as a two-way communication rather than a top-down hierarchy.

3 National congress, central committee, executive committee and national conference.

4 Regional congress, regional committee, regional executive committee and regional conference.

5 Constituency conference, constituency committee and constituency executive committee.

6 Ward annual general meeting and ward committee.

7 For the BDP, it comprises the President of the party, the Chairperson, the Secretary General, the Treasurer, the deputy Secretary General, the deputy Treasurer, ten ordinary members of the party, and chairpersons of the women's and youth wings. For the BNF, it comprises the President, Vice President, Secretary General, deputy Secretary General, Treasurer, Chairperson, Organising secretary, Secretary for Political Education, Secretary for Information and Publicity, Secretary for International Affairs, Secretary for Labour Affairs, Secretary for Health and Social Services, Secretary for Economic Affairs, Secretary for Youth Affairs, and three additional members appointed by the President.

Accountability

Political parties account to the Registrar of Societies to ensure that they are active and are not struck off the roster of political parties. They also account to their general membership. The basic grain of representative democracy is that elected officials must report back to those who elected them. The First Past The Post (FPTP) system provides an effective link between MPs and the people they represent.

However, floor crossing is one area in which political parties violate their contract with the electorate. Botswana has no law regulating the crossing of the floor, and in this regard, voters have been taken for a ride. Politicians often cross the floor by resigning from the party under whose ticket they contested the election and joining an opposing party without losing their seat. In 1999, Parliament passed a motion calling for candidates to lose their seats when they defect, but the government is yet to prepare a bill to this effect.

Political parties have codes of discipline,⁸ which spell out offences that members could be charged with. Transgressors of these codes are often disciplined through fines, suspension and sometimes expulsion. A code of discipline is different from a code of ethics. Whilst a code of discipline talks about punishable offences, a code of ethic talks about an appropriate conduct that does not violate the integrity of the party by bringing it into disrepute. None of the parties⁹ in Botswana has a code of conduct for leaders, which would spell out the expectations, qualities, virtues and responsibilities of leaders. It is desirable that political parties should have a code of ethics, which would guide elected representatives (councillors and MPs) and central committee members. There is doubt that a strict and robust code of conduct could exist within political parties when there is no political will to introduce it at the national level. In 1998 Parliament passed a motion calling for the Cabinet and MPs to declare their interests. To date, government has not come up with a bill calling for the declaration of assets.¹⁰

The BNF code of discipline has been in the public domain due to allegations that its leader, Otsweletse Moupo, misappropriated party funds and also committed serious blunders, such as failure to respond to the State of the Nation address; being financially stranded in London and being bailed out by the government that he opposes, and financial troubles surrounding his law firm. This litany of lapses led some of his colleagues in the central committee to demand that he steps down to absolve the party of his personal difficulties. The BNF code of discipline, among other things, calls for a high sense of duty, responsibility, constructive

8 Botswana Congress Party Code of Discipline and Conduct; Botswana Congress Party Primary Election Regulations; Constitution of the Botswana Congress Party 1998.

9 The BCP is the only party that claims to have developed a draft code of ethics to be tabled before the party congress in July 2007.

10 Ramadubu, K. and O. Rebaone. *Botswana Guardian*. 2007. 'Assets bill divides Cabinet.' 23 March. 4.

criticism of others and self-criticism as basic tenets of internal party democracy. But these codes are flaunted with impunity. It would seem that the code of discipline¹¹ of the BNF, as it stands, is nothing more than a paper tiger because many of the offences listed in it are the same that Moupo is alleged to have committed without any action being taken against him.

Code of ethics

When political parties are dysfunctional, the project of democracy is always compromised. Political parties face numerous challenges in the crusade to deepen democracy. Perhaps the most critical of these challenges, as pointed out by the IEC in 2002, is the growing disenchantment of the electorate with party politics. Voters are generally disengaged from politics manifesting in low levels of political participation. Leadership crisis is a problem that appears to beset all political parties. During the decolonisation period, the BPP was polarised by leadership squabbles between Philip Matante and Motsamai Mpho, leading to the split of the party and the birth of the Botswana Independence Party.

The BNF is perhaps the party that has been most affected by splits. Between 1984 and 1988, factions of the party split to form the United Socialist Party, Botswana Workers Front, Freedom Party, Botswana Labour Party and the Social Democratic Party. Perhaps the most dramatic of these splits was in 1998 and 2001, which led to the formation of the BCP and NDF, respectively.

The most recent leadership crisis in the BNF occurred in 2006 following a fall-out between its leader, Otsweletse Moupo, on the one hand, and members of his central committee on the other hand, leading to some resigning and others calling for the leader to step down. The litany of blunders¹² and funds¹³ he is alleged to have misappropriated are cited as the reasons. In a strange twist of events, the BNF leader faced a revolt by his central committee, something that led to the downfall of his predecessor, Dr Kenneth Koma. In the build-up

11 Among other things, these include disobedience of directives or instructions from a lawful authority; fraudulent behaviour in financial matters; formation of cliques, cabals or factions within the party; malicious gossip within the party ranks; abusive and insulting language to another member or member of the public; corrupt practice or misconduct likely to tarnish the image of the party; divulging party secrets to non-members or any unauthorised person; character assassination and dissemination of information on party internal matters to public media organisations without proper authority. For details see Botswana National Front, Code of Discipline adopted by the central committee in Gaborone on 7 December 1996.

12 The BNF Youth league supported Moupo. See *Mmegi*. 2007. Mooketsi, L. 'The BNF Youth League supports Comrade Moupo.' 18 May. 27. A BNF stalwart, O.K. Menyatso likened Moupo to a suicide bomber who dies with everybody else. See O.K. Menyatso. 'Moupo behaves like a suicide bomber.' *Mmegi*. 2007. 18 May. 27.

13 Failure to disclose and account for funds that were given to the BNF, BAM and BPP by a donor. For details see Mogalakwe, M. *Mmegi*. 2007. 'Moupo and the corrupting influence of money.' 18 May. 15. Also see Ramaotwana, N. *Mmegi*. 2007. 'Dear Mme Letshabo.' 13 April. 14, 16-17 and 20.

to the 1998 congress, the late Dr Koma faced a revolt within his central committee, but it was young Moupo who rose from outside it, defeating Koma's faction in 2001. However, in 2007, Moupo called for a Special Congress that dissolved his own central committee, in which party delegates were said to be choosing between 'right and wrong' and 'morality and immorality'.¹⁴

In all the previous party crises, it appears that the critical issue was a crisis in leadership. Even though Botswana is widely acclaimed for its *botho*,¹⁵ its people appear not to attach a high premium to ethical conduct. This is more so because political parties only have codes of discipline, and not codes of ethics. Whichever way one looks at it, it appears that the BNF leadership has failed to inculcate the values¹⁶ and ideals of morality and good conduct.

Financial accountability

Political parties across the political divide follow normal administrative and financial requirements in which the party treasurer reports on the financial status of the party at every executive meeting. It is also a statutory requirement that at every congress the treasurer presents an audited financial report to the general membership of the party detailing money received from membership subscriptions, donations from councillors, MPs and other private sources.¹⁷ However, due to weak structures, funds have been misappropriated without effective remedies.

The BDP is the only party that has a tender committee.¹⁸ The values that underpin this committee are transparency; fairness and equity; anti-corruption; integrity and accountability, and professional responsibility in the procurement and disposal of party assets. Outside these normal administrative procedures, the law in Botswana does not require political parties to account to anybody for their financial resources.

The electoral law does not require the accounts of political parties to be checked or audited by independent auditors. Unlike public funds, which are audited by the Auditor General and scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee, funds for political parties largely remain the private domain of the party concerned despite the fact that they are collected from the public through membership subscriptions and private donations. Although it is general practice that party accounts are presented at party congresses, these are usually raw accounts that are not audited.

14 Ibid.

15 A sense of compassion, civility and consideration.

16 Motsokono, A. 2007. *Botswana Guardian*. 'BNF fights for values.' 18 May. 4.

17 Interviews on 23 May 2007 with Batlang Serema, Executive Secretary BDP; Kagiso Tshwene, Executive Secretary BCP; Moeti Mohwasa, Secretary General BNF; Taolo Lucas, Secretary General BCP.

18 BDP Finance and Economic Sub-Committee. 15 August 2006.

Political party funding in Botswana has not received the attention it deserves. It is, nevertheless, one of the most problematic areas in the sustainability of political parties. It raises fundamental questions of whether political parties should be funded. Where political parties do not have adequate resources to train people, democracy often remains hollow. Funding of political parties allows them to maintain a certain level of political visibility, and they are able to compete effectively in the political arena. Although much depends on the formula agreed to dispense such resources, funding of political parties, by and large, ensures equitable distribution of resources.

The fairness of elections is also measured by the ability of political parties to have equal chances to canvass for political support. In a country that is as geographically diverse as Botswana, political parties need resources in order to effectively mobilise voters. Resources are essential for organisation and strategic planning, manpower training and transportation. Funding is also an important facet in terms of maintaining political visibility and a credible profile in the eyes of the electorate. To be effective, political parties need funds to finance their campaigns; to print campaign materials, billboards, fliers, as well as to advertise in the electronic and print media. Opposition parties have fared poorly in this regard. Botswana neither has public funding of political parties nor regulation of external funding of parties. The ruling¹⁹ and opposition²⁰ parties trade accusations about the secret funding they receive. Worse still, in the absence of proper disclosure laws, these funds are often misappropriated.

The only token form of financial accountability in Botswana is with respect to the ceiling of P50,000.00 imposed on councillors and MPs. The electoral law requires candidates not to exceed this figure after the writ of elections is issued. This provision does not take into account the fact that a lot of campaign work is done before the writ of elections. The expectation is that candidates retire their election expenses to the returning officer to claim their deposits. No attempt is ever made to verify the authenticity of the declarations. Moreover, there is no limit as to what a party can spend on a candidate.

19 BDP once had funds donated by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which they are alleged to have appropriated. See Othogile, B. 1991. 'How free and fair?' In Molomo and Mokopagosi (Eds). *Multi-Party Democracy in Botswana*. Sapes Books: Harare.

20 The BNF saga involving Moupo's unethical conduct also revolves around some P150,000.00 from an undisclosed source to benefit the opposition parties (BNF, BAM and BPP). See Mogalakwe, M. *Mmegi*. 'Moupo and the corrupting influence of money.' 18 May. 15. The BCP is on record that it received financial assistance from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy for the past three years and also receives technical support from the Labour Party in the form of capacity building workshops on issues such as basic party administration, policy development and the understanding of the social democratic programme. Interview with Kagiso Tshwene and Taolo Lucas. 23 May 2007.

Free and fair elections

As a basic requirement of democracy, elections must be perceived as free and fair. Most elections in the region satisfy the criteria of free elections. Elections are free when the electoral law provides for the basic freedoms such as freedom of speech, association and assembly. These freedoms are coupled with the freedom to vote without intimidation and harassment. Free and fair elections can only take place in an environment free of fear, violence and intimidation. Therefore the political system should create a culture of peace and political tolerance. The security forces should maintain a neutral role in the provision of election security. In most countries in the region, especially Botswana, these freedoms are a given.

What is often difficult to ascertain is the fairness of elections due to an uneven playing field. Top on the agenda contributing to this, is the electoral law, which prescribes an electoral system. Every electoral system has its own predisposition that performs differently on various indicators of democracy. The rule of thumb is that plurality majority systems produce stable and accountable governments, while proportional systems produce representative and inclusive governments. Other important yardsticks for measuring the fairness of an electoral system are political party funding, access to the state media and the use of incumbency. Funding elections is a big industry that can advance or undermine democracy. It is simple logic that elections must be preceded by effective voter mobilisation and education to ensure that the electorate are well informed and that this requires lots of resources: the disproportionate allocation of resources advantages some and disadvantages others. However, the unrestrained and unregulated funding of parties, especially secret and private funding of parties, has the potential to compromise the integrity of the electoral process and the country.

Although most SADC countries guarantee freedom of the press, the norm is that ruling parties tend to dominate the public media. The use of the official media and transport are among the issues that give the incumbent an unfair advantage over opponents. The strategic timing and announcement of the election date is the prerogative of the President, which gives his political party a head start over opposing parties. In other jurisdictions, a more accommodative dispensation is one in which the election date is set in the Constitution, and this is the dispensation that is preferred to set the norms and standards for the region.

Political participation

It is widely accepted that political participation is the hallmark of liberal democratic politics. Without it, a political system would lose its credibility and legitimacy. Increasing popular participation in the electoral process is one important way of strengthening and deepening democracy. Although there are considerable differences around how much political participation is necessary for democracy to function effectively, the common values espoused by democracy theorists are that civic engagements are intrinsically associated with a well functioning democracy.

Participating in civic life is a virtue and makes one a better citizen. But this is not so in Botswana, where voter apathy is high, as Table 11.1 shows.

Table 11.1: Voting Trends: 1965 – 2004

Column	1	2	3	4	5	6
Year	Voting Age Population	Total Registered	Total Voted	% of 2/1	% of 3/1	% of 3/2
1965	202,800	188,950	140,858	93	69	75
1969	205,200	140,428	76,858	68	37	55
1974	244,200	205,050	64,011	84	26	31
1979	290,033	230,231	134,496	79	46	58
1984	420,400	293,571	227,756	70	54	78
1989	522,900	367,069	250,487	70	48	68
1994	634,920	361,915	277,454	57	45	77
1999	867,000	459,662	354,466	53	41	77
2004	920,000	552,849	421,272	60	46	76
Average				70	46	66

Source: Compiled from IEC Election Reports

Column 4 highlights the disparities between those eligible and those who actually registered for the election. It shows that the size of the population that registered for the elections was less than the eligible population, and the disparity worsened in 1989, 1994, 1999, and picked up in 2004.

Column 5 highlights the percentage of people who actually voted out of the total eligible population. It demonstrates that the percentage that actually voted was much less than the eligible population. It also shows that the population that voted was consistently less than half the eligible population, except on only two occasions, 1965 and 1984.

Column 6 highlights the percentages of those who voted out of the population that had registered. It shows that the percentage of people who voted from the list of those who had registered was consistently above half, except in 1974 when it went down dramatically.

In another regard, there is a disproportionate allocation of political roles between men and women. More specifically, political parties across the political spectrum in Botswana have failed women candidates. Although women comprise the majority of the population and are active mobilising agents, they are kept out of the decision-making structures in political

parties and government. While SADC countries are signatories of the 1997 declaration on gender equality and development, in its decision-making structures, Botswana is still far from meeting the 30 percent quota set for 2005.

Opposition parties

Opposition parties are an indispensable part of a liberal democratic framework. They are supposed to keep government accountable and be ready to take over the reigns of power. Botswana opposition politics remains a curious phenomenon. It is characterised by factionalism and splits. Although attempts to unify opposition parties date back to 1965, splits remain their defining characteristic. The break up of the BNF in 1998 and the continued fracture of opposition parties and their failure to coalesce and form a credible alliance or coalition to present an effective challenge to the BDP has led to a decline in people's political trust in opposition politics.

Conclusions

The national integrity of political parties is an all-encompassing process in the democracy debate. It entails accountability through national congresses, *kgotla* meetings conducted by elected representatives, and media coverage of party activities. All political parties in Botswana hold congresses where leaders are openly elected and policies approved.

Without doubt, Botswana parties have structures spread throughout the country for mobilisation and representation purposes. However, inadequate resources make the reach of some political parties less than others that have more resources. In addition, the large parties hold primary elections to select candidates. But all of them have failed to promote gender equality in their structures. In addition, while parties have codes of discipline, they do not have codes of ethics, leaving their leaders exposed to unethical conduct.