Prospects for political change figure prominently on the research agenda in sub-Saharan Africa, and in current debates within individual countries. Democracy is advocated not only as a goal in itself, since it is also frequently argued that elections and openness are required to make governments really responsive to the needs of the population and properly accountable for their actions. In addition, greater transparency is held to be necessary in order to make the public service behave in accordance with bureaucratic norms. Although the general principles of responsiveness, accountability, and transparency are embraced by a large number of scholars and observers of the African scene as a means of countering the detrimental effects of clientelism and personalistic rule, important nuances are found in the literature with regard to the way in which democracy is perceived to facilitate economic development in general, and presently needed reforms in particular.

Botswana has been acclaimed for the resilience of her democratic institutions, a prospering private sector, and healthy public finances. However, books and articles have also drawn attention to problematic aspects of the country's economic growth, notably widespread rural poverty and insufficient diversification. Several authors have underscored the elitist and paternalistic nature of politics in Botswana, and although these became recognisably more pluralistic in the 1980s, a nearly mythical picture has been painted in recent analyses, depicting politics and policy-making as dominated by senior civil servants, government politicians, and cattle owners.

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2 This is a recurring view in an anthology of contributions by scholars from the University of Botswana: Mpho G. Molomo and Brian T. Mokopakgosi (eds.), Multi-Party Democracy in Botswana (Harare, 1991).

Because of Botswana's small population of 1.3 million, relative ethnic homogeneity, and large revenues from diamond exports, one is forced to ask whether it is so 'exceptional' that it has little to offer by way of an example to other African countries wishing to establish a democratic system. It is difficult, however, to deny that the Government has been far more successful in its management of the economy than others in the continent — in a context closer to a democratic model than to various blends of African authoritarian rule. Common aspects of state weakness observed elsewhere are far less prevalent in Botswana. According to Kenneth Good:

Corruption and mismanagement in Botswana is relatively pale and restricted... It is not systemic to the whole of the political economy as in Zaïre... Nor is it epidemic, afflicting the whole society, as in Nigeria, and there is decidedly no 'culture of corruption' as exists in Brazil. Its significance lies in contrast with the generally reputable and efficient governmental performance preceding the 1980s, and in what [several recent cases] might presage for the future. Responsibility and accountability have been seriously reduced within the top-most levels of the Government, but to-date many state institutions and most citizens remain untarnished.

Although differing from more pluralistic democracies in several important institutional aspects, it is no mean achievement for this Southern African country to have been able to hold multi-party elections at five-year intervals since 1969, and for Quett Masire to have been re-elected as President in 1984, 1989, and 1994, after succeeding peacefully, and in accordance with the constitution, Seretse Khama on his death in 1980. In addition, several Cabinet colleagues were forced to resign (including the Vice-President in 1992) after it became clear that they had misused their positions for personal gain. All this suggests that democracy is on its way to become institutionalized in Botswana.

Sustainability of agreed democratic procedures does not necessarily imply that the mode of governance is characterized by responsiveness and accountability, however. Hence the need to analyse more explicitly how institutions affect the dynamics of politics by focusing on policymaking processes, or by asking how policy choices reflect preferences in

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society, as well as to what extent the system of regular elections has made those in power responsive to various interests.

DEMOCRATIC RULE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Despite a wide range of differing views about how African states ought to solve their present multi-faceted difficulties, there seems to be increasing agreement that significant causes are to be found in the prevailing state–society relationships which are often permeated by clientelism, resulting in mismanagement of political and administrative structures, and economic policies being guided by the logic of parimonialism rather than economic efficiency. Calls for an effective, albeit authoritarian, development-oriented state, with a capacity to guarantee political stability, may look attractive as a way out of the problems. Thomas Callaghy, for example, contending that the technocratic and bureaucratic capabilities of the African state have to be strengthened, argues that a requirement for taking advantage of such a prescription is to insulate the government from ‘threatening political, societal, and international pressures that might prevent the inherent economic logic of the adjustment process from coming into play to the extent necessary’. As democracy implies more open policy processes, any such plea may be seen as a justification for a political system which restricts civil liberties.

Promoting such a strategy is not a novelty in the development literature since the same reasoning has been applied by the proponents of bureaucratic authoritarianism in Latin America. As for the newly industrialised countries in South-East Asia, it has been similarly argued that without restraining individuals, parties, and interest groups from articulating their interests, and thus insulating the decision-makers, their governments would have been less successful in facilitating such successful economic growth.

6 For a review of relevant research, see Tony Killick, Explaining Africa’s Post-Independence Development Experiences (London, Overseas Development Institute, 1992), Working Paper No. 60.
Considering the fact that a number of African countries are engaged in a process of democratisation, induced either by domestic and/or external forces, it seems more relevant to address the question about what to expect from such endeavours than to be defeatist and call for an imaginative type of benevolent despotism. As Richard Sandbrook convincingly argues, given that 'the case for developmental dictatorship rests heavily on the experience of the East Asian NICs', it needs to be remembered that they 'were guided at the appropriate time by a ruling group dedicated to rapid development with a degree of equality', and that 'these elites emerged in particular historical and cultural conditions' not found elsewhere, including tropical Africa.10 Hence the need to ask whether states can only become reasonably 'strong' as opposed to ineffectually 'weak' if their leaders are insulated from societal pressures through repressive authoritarianism.

Improved governance is a key concept in much of the present writing on how to transform the situation in Africa, and although often associated with more effective policy-making and administrative reform, the rôle of civil society is given increasing attention.11 As formulated by Michael Bratton and Donald Rothchild:

governments do not regulate themselves; they must be checked and balanced by an active, articulate, and organized citizenry... When citizens regard state commands as legitimate, governmental effectiveness is more easily attained because it rests on a bedrock of voluntary compliance.12

In other words, it is argued that the likelihood of improved governance will partly reflect the ability of civil society to give 'feedback' to political rulers, to make them accountable. Peter Anyang’ Nyong’o claims that African experiences reveal that those régimes which, at least to some extent, give leeway for participation, have 'done much better in terms of economic growth than the less participatory ones'.13

Incorporating the mechanism of accountability into decision-making includes, according to William Keech, two key elements.14 First, the

11 One recent example is Hyden and Bratton (eds.), op. cit.
12 Michael Bratton and Donald Rothchild, 'The Institutional Bases of Governance in Africa', in ibid. p. 256.
political rulers are required to 'explain, report, or justify', and this implies in a democratic setting that a government has to keep citizens informed about its activities, *inter alia* through participation in policymaking by elected representatives. Second, accountability implies that politicians are 'subject to sanction', which means that they can be removed in the event of inadequate performance – for example, the members of the legislature may declare a vote of no confidence in the government, or they may not be re-elected if voters are dissatisfied with their performance. The first element, transparency, can be seen as an unambiguous advantage in policy-making, in that corruption becomes less easy to hide. The second element, however, seems to be at the core of the debate about the effects of democracy on economic policymaking. Critics claim that fear of not being re-elected will induce politicians to make populist economic policy priorities without grounding these on technocratic efficiency criteria.15

It seems too simplistic, however, to assume that democracy will inevitably become a seed-bed for populism. In a situation of extremely scarce resources, as in most of contemporary Africa, there may simply not be much scope for expansionist policies. As emphasised in the governance approach, legitimacy may be built on factors beyond the distribution of patronage – *responsible* leadership may be a feature of similar importance as *responsiveness*.16 And, as this analysis of Botswana will demonstrate, regularly held elections do not necessarily impel a government to loosen control of public spending even if ample resources are available.

**THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A SECOND INDEPENDENCE**

Botswana was regarded as one of the ten poorest countries in the world when it became independent in 1966.17 The exceptionally low level of economic development was manifest in an inadequate physical infrastructure, the virtual absence of an industrial sector, and a weak


16 This is a foundation underscored by Goran Hyden, 'Governance and the Study of Politics', in Hyden and Bratton (eds.), op. cit. p. 12.

administrative capacity. With the largest urban settlement not exceeding 10,000 people, and 90 per cent of the population based in the underdeveloped rural economy, one could hardly talk about any urbanisation at all. Harsh physical conditions made it difficult to be optimistic about future prospects, which meant that President Seretse Khama and his ministers had to make strict priorities within severe manpower and financial constraints.

After prospecting operations had revealed a potential for diamond and copper-nickel mining, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) Government understandably allocated a major share of public spending and administrative capacity to stepping up the development of the mineral industry. Resources were also devoted to the institutional expansion of the government apparatus, construction of the capital Gaborone, and improvement of the roads. Mineral exports, a renegotiated customs union agreement with South Africa, and an increased flow of development aid from multiple sources, improved the revenue situation noticeably from the early 1970s onwards. Charles Harvey and Stephen Lewis aptly characterise the turning point in 1972–3, when Botswana ceased to rely on support from the United Kingdom to finance recurrent spending, as the achievement of ‘a second independence’.

The next 20 years saw continuous improvements in the financial situation. Three diamond mines had become operational by the early 1980s, making mining a major contributor to GDP (about one-third), and the revenues from exports exceeded the costs of imports. According to World Bank figures, Botswana had by 1989 experienced the highest rates of growth in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa since the mid-1960s. Although South African capital had financed the bulk of investment in the mining sector, a large share of the profits has accrued to the Botswana Government. Keith Jeffries characterised the negotiated deal with DeBeers as ‘reputed to be one of the best ever secured between a developing country government and a major multinational mining company’. These revenues, constituting about half of the state’s income, together with import duties and development

20 Ibid. pp. 38–43.
21 World Bank, Sub-Saharan Africa: from crisis to sustainable growth. A Long-Term Perspective Study (Washington, DC, 1989), Table 2, p. 222.
aid, have equipped the Government with a financial manoeuvrability which is exceptional in the developing world.\textsuperscript{23} A politically significant implication of this revenue base is that there has been less pressure to tax goods, services, and incomes, or to extract resources from the agricultural sector, than in many other African countries.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{POLITICS GAINING SIGNIFICANCE}

With budgetary constraints being relieved so dramatically from the mid-1970s onwards, the Government was faced with a new challenge of how to allocate disbursements. How much should be spent? ... transferred to the private sector and parastatals? ... saved? In retrospect, the accumulation of substantial financial reserves may suggest that the BDP has pursued a conservative public spending policy. The growth in public revenues has in most years even exceeded the growth in expenditures.\textsuperscript{25} The cash reserves held by the Government in 1985 actually exceeded total recurrent spending in that year\textsuperscript{26} – all the more remarkable given the fact that throughout the post-independence period, total public spending as a proportion of GDP has been among the largest in sub-Saharan Africa, and that it has grown at an 'exceptionally high' speed.\textsuperscript{27} How have politics affected the distribution of these funds?

In the elections held in 1965, the BDP won as many as 28 of the 31 elected seats in the Legislative Assembly. The following year the independence constitution provided for a House of Chiefs with 15 members, and a National Assembly consisting of the Speaker, the Attorney-General (with no voting rights), and 31 elected members (increased to 34 in 1984 and to 40 in 1994), as well as four specially appointed by the President. In the first elections held thereafter, the acquisition by the opposition of seven of the elected seats in the National Assembly represented a setback for President Khama and the ruling party. Jack Parson attributes the outcome of these 1969 elections to the tensions arising from the traditional power structure being supplanted by a newly established central authority based on legal-rational principles, as well as the fact that the electorate at large had

\textsuperscript{23} Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. pp. 192–4.
\textsuperscript{24} In the 1980s taxes on households were about the same volume as development grants, and less than one-tenth of government revenues from the mining industry. See Botswana, \textit{The National Development Plan 7: 1991–1997} (Gaborone, 1991), Table A11, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{25} Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. p. 195.
\textsuperscript{27} World Bank, op. cit. Table 25, and Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. p. 214.
not experienced any improvements in their standard of living in the immediate aftermath of independence.\footnote{28} With the approach of the next elections in 1974 there was a perceived need for the incumbent party to present visible results of its rule to the electorate.

The launching in 1973 of a rural development programme meant a substantial increase in funds allocated to the rural sector in the years to come.\footnote{29} Water regulation, primary schools, health facilities, and road improvements were given due attention,\footnote{30} and although these efforts may be seen as sincere attempts to somehow fulfil the Government’s stated rural development objectives, the political motive behind this sudden increase in spending was obvious. According to Parson, the timing of the programme was ‘designed to ensure the completion of visible projects in rural areas by election day’.\footnote{31} John Holm underscores the Government’s special concern with an even distribution of the funds and projects in different parts of the country, as ‘each region obtained a share of construction approximately proportionate to its population’.\footnote{32} Since the BDP improved its support by nearly ten per cent in the 1974 elections, and regained two of its lost seats, the strategy seems to have worked.

The approach adopted in the early 1970s continued throughout the decade, with attention being mainly given to the development of physical infrastructure and social services, while inadequate funds were assigned to agricultural modernisation.\footnote{33} The rural sector was not totally neglected, however, because some remedial actions were taken to check the detrimental ecological consequences of the expanding cattle herds.

Since the nineteenth century, the rearing of cattle and the export of meat had been important income-generating activities in the Tswana-dominated areas. Writings on Botswana have frequently emphasised the close linkages between the initial political elite, Seretse Khama included, and the cattle industry. The latter has been favoured, not surprisingly, by public policies and funds distributed, and has remained

\footnote{30} Picard, op. cit. p. 241.  
\footnote{33} Agriculture received only three per cent of development spending between 1973 and 1976, according to Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. p. 249, Table 10.1.
a major source of income for the individual Motswana, not least because of privileged access to the European Community market – by means of a fixed quota and reduced tariffs. However, as mineral exports grew, cattle began to lose significance as a source of foreign exchange, and the industry today represents a net cost in the national budget. In other words, taxes and payments for services received from holders of cattle have not exceeded the transfers to the sub-sector from the Government, notably vaccination, fencing, and subsidies for drilling boreholes.34

Given that the use of large areas of communal land was difficult to manage as the number of cattle grew, the response by the Government in 1975, as manifested in the National Policy on Tribal Grazing Land (TGLP), was to increasingly base production on individual tenure and fenced-off grazing areas. Although the initial purpose of the TGLP may have been otherwise, the policy has favoured the better-off farmers and contributed to the maintenance of the unequal distribution of cattle herds.35 The Government has, in general, been reluctant to adopt policies which work against the interests of the cattle-owning economic elite by, for example, increasing taxation or limiting the size of the herds. The development of the communal areas has not been given priority, partly because state revenues from fenced commercial lands have – for obvious political reasons – been set too low to provide necessary funds, as initially intended.36

The revised agricultural policy presented by the Government in 1991 reiterated concerns about the environmental impact of the cattle industry, although it is difficult to find any elements which impose restrictions on the better-off farmers. The fencing of grazing lands will continue, including the communal areas.37 It is clear in retrospect that the political loyalty of the cattle-owning elites has been given due attention since independence.

EMERGING STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY

The 1980s represent a turning point in both the economic and political history of Botswana. The construction of basic physical infrastructure was about to be completed, the mining industry had become operational, and a macro-economic environment characterised

34 Ibid. pp. 79 and 89.
36 Ibid. and Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. p. 89.
by insignificant inflation, a stable exchange rate, and balanced public budgets had been established. The President’s death in 1980 raised the question of the extent to which political stability in the previous decade had been based on the personal and traditional authority of Seretse Khama, or whether legitimacy had been generated by socio-economic achievements. Quett Masire was affiliated to a less powerful tribe, and his succession to the Presidency might have been challenged if legal-rational principles had not been established previously. The large turnout at the elections in 1984, 1989, and 1994, and the continued support for the BDP by the majority of the electorate, lend credence to Parson’s conclusion that the political order and legitimacy were increasingly grounded in the concept of elected representative parliamentary government.\(^{38}\)

A more diversified socio-economic structure emerged in the wake of the economic growth and improved educational opportunities of the 1970s. As the service and manufacturing sectors expanded, cattle ownership ceased to be the only route to personal prosperity. This differentiation led to increased political competition, and, according to Parson, ‘may be best understood as the beginning of normal politics in a capitalist parliamentary democracy such as Botswana’\(^{39}\).

Although the flow of revenues from the diamond industry decreased temporarily in the early 1980s, mainly because of falling world market prices, the financial scope of manoeuvrability of the Government was sustained throughout the decade.\(^{40}\) It was recognised that there was a need for more employment opportunities in both the towns and rural areas, and diversification of the economy, especially by the development of manufacturing, emerged at the forefront of the Government’s agenda.\(^{41}\) A feature of several programmes was a generous grant component, which meant that revenues generated by the mining industry were transferred to entrepreneurs in the private sector.

There was seemingly a dual motive behind these allocations. On the one hand, the Government was guided by the rational principles of its open and market-oriented economic strategy. It was deliberately avoiding becoming directly involved in productive activities, and thus preferred to stimulate economic diversification by supporting private enterprise instead of becoming a main employer itself. On the other hand, the political loyalty of an increasingly diversified economic elite

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\(^{38}\) Parson, loc. cit. 1990, p. 142.

\(^{39}\) Ibid. p. 126.


\(^{41}\) The new orientation seems to have been influenced by Michael Lipton’s comprehensive report, Botswana: employment and labour use in Botswana (Gaborone, 1978).
had to be maintained, and similarly to the BDP’s strategy towards rural constituencies, distributionist policies were applied as a means of nurturing political loyalties.

**DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL PATRONAGE**

The launching of the Financial Assistance Policy (FAP) in 1982, followed by the Industrial Development Policy (IDP) in 1984, were both attempts to stimulate growth in the manufacturing sector. These schemes, which excluded cattle and mining activities, mainly provided direct financial support for small-scale entrepreneurs—limited to citizen owners, and seen by Raphael Kaplinsky as a response to political pressure for indigenous participation in industry— as well as medium- and large-scale enterprises. Employment creation in manufacturing accelerated in the 1980s, with a major contribution from the private sector.43

To give the main credit for the rise in employment to the FAP and the IDP after their introduction does not seem entirely justified. Although it has been estimated that the FAP had produced 4,500 new jobs by 1987, this was only half the projected number. Evaluations revealed that the focus on financial support was inadequate to tackle the major obstacles to industrial development.44 In other words in its efforts to induce economic diversification, the Government overlooked such constraints as the insufficient competence of entrepreneurs and skills of many workers, the inadequate functioning of the markets, and technological weaknesses. Kaplinsky further argues that much of the increased employment might have occurred even without financial support, and claims that an associated ‘free rider’ problem has emerged. For example, a survey of medium- and large-scale enterprises revealed that the majority would have made their investments even without support from these schemes.45

The growth of manufacturing has seemingly been stimulated by other factors, notably the attractiveness of the open Botswana economy to entrepreneurs in neighbouring countries, especially from Zimbabwe; the increased demand caused by the revenues generated by cattle and

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44 Kaplinsky, loc. cit. p. 156.

minerals; and the potential for domestic production left by the colonial neglect of this sector. Still, a substantial number of Batswana entrepreneurs benefited from the schemes. A large number of the small enterprises, and some medium-scale, which received support in the 1985–90 period were located in rural areas. Even if the FAP may not have worked as intended in terms of industrial development, the transfers certainly contributed to the maintenance of the support base for the ruling party.

The fifth National Development Plan, 1979–85, declared that priority would be given to arable farming, and hence the special scheme launched by the Government in 1980 with the ambitious objective of achieving self-sufficiency in basic grains, and increasing rural employment opportunities – explicitly aimed at slowing down migration to urban centres. The Arable Land Development Programme (ALDEP) was only authorised to supply small-scale farms with financial grants, but after the first phase had been seriously constrained by a drought which started in 1982, a complementary Accelerated Rainfed Arable Programme (ARAP) began to enlarge the target group in 1985 to include farms of medium scale – a policy initiative with a substantial grant element. Kjetil Børhaug argues that this must be looked upon as a political response to the initial lack of success of ALDEP, and although both schemes led to an increase in hectares planted and total output, the productivity of the sector did not improve. In other words, they became ‘a subsidy of existing arable farming patterns’ and ‘not... an incentive for change and development’.

During the sixth planning period, 1985–91, the funds spent on ARAP, together with associated drought relief measures, were nearly double the total for other activities designed to assist agriculture. The domestic production cost of most cereals was raised to twice the import price by these subsidies, which continued for about two years after the drought ended. This may have been necessary in order to give the farmers some time to adapt to the new conditions. On the other hand, the extension covered the 1989 elections, and as the subsidies had benefited most of the Batswana engaged in arable agriculture, it is

48 Kjetil Børhaug, Politics, Administration and Agricultural Development: the case of Botswana’s Accelerated Rainfed Arable Programme (Bergen, 1992), pp. 119 and 121.
justified to conclude that ARAP had a significant political dimension, albeit ineffective as a modernisation device.

**SELECTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN THE ECONOMY**

Considering the decisions taken elsewhere in Africa after windfall revenues from mining or oil got into the hands of the political rulers, the Botswana Government might have been expected to establish state-owned industrial enterprises. Such transfers of public funds have not been less substantial in Botswana than in other countries, but of a different nature. Direct involvement in the economy, however, has been limited to a few parastatals which provide core services in utilities and infrastructure, such as railways, civil aviation, electricity, water, and telecommunications. Public enterprises engaged in housing and marketing of agricultural produce also exist, and the Government holds shares in several manufacturing firms through the Botswana Development Corporation. However, these activities have operated mainly on commercial grounds and made profits.\(^{51}\)

The sectors and individuals benefiting from the Government's budgetary allocations still reflect a form of political rule which has found it increasingly necessary to accommodate the interests of a diversity of societal forces. The second half of the 1980s confirmed that a number of BDP ministers had become much less financially prudent than heretofore. During 1985–91, actual development expenditures exceeded those originally projected by 143 per cent.\(^{52}\) Considering the explicit political dimension of the FAP and ARAP schemes, it seems justified to further link the general increase in public spending to the setbacks experienced by the ruling party in 1984. The outcome of the 1989 elections revealed that the BDP had not been able to mobilise new voters, and faced by growing support for the Botswana National Front (BNF), the incumbent party has been compelled to utilise public policies to maintain political support.

Fiscal control has not been lost, however, despite an increase in public spending, about one-fifth of which was related to the cost of the drought between 1982 and 1988. The growth in revenues received from mineral exports induced the Government to spend substantially more on the military, as well as to step up the implementation of projects already decided upon. However, the Minister of Finance admitted in


1991 that the effects on the recurrent budget of the increase in development spending had been underestimated, and the National Development Plan adopted that year outlined how the rate of expenditure would be decelerated during 1991–7.

That the Government is capable of carrying out such a politically sensitive decision has been demonstrated in the past, and formal mechanisms built into the planning system have enabled appropriate counter-cyclical measures to be taken by those responsible for managing the country’s foreign-exchange reserves. For example, when the diamond export revenues declined during 1981–2 because of falling world market prices, the Government efficiently reduced expenditure – as reflected by the zero-growth of recurrent spending in 1983 – and further demonstrated its strength by abruptly terminating the subsidies for arable agriculture in 1990. In other words, it looks as if the price of political support until then had been kept within manageable limits, and those in power were selective in their response to societal needs.

Studies undertaken by the Government show that some parts of the country appear to have hardly benefited from mineral-led economic growth, and that many Batswana have been left behind in the development process. A household income survey conducted during 1985–6 revealed that large inequalities of income had remained unchanged since the early 1970s, thereby providing evidence, according to Harvey and Lewis, that ‘fourteen years of rapid overall growth had little measurable impact on poor households’ cash income’. A commission appointed by the Government concluded similarly that ‘rural development policies have had only limited impact on relative poverty’.

On the other hand, various indicators show that the standard of living has improved with regard to health and education. The provision of public services – notably clinics, primary schools, access to safe water, and subsidised urban housing – has improved throughout

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56 Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. p. 216.
58 Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. p. 262.
the 1970s and 1980s, and these facilities are fairly equally distributed throughout the country.\textsuperscript{60} Nevertheless, rural poverty must be looked upon as a persistent structural problem, given the low level of productive activities and absence of regular work for wages. Although some efforts have been made to improve the situation, including trying to target and concentrate certain rural developments within each district, these initiatives cannot be considered as a major response to the insufficient non-farming employment opportunities. Hardly any modernisation has taken place in agriculture,\textsuperscript{61} and a lack of will or ability by decision-makers to respond to rural challenges in a comprehensive fashion is apparently one factor behind the stagnation. The revised agricultural policy presented in 1991 confirmed that the BDP has no intention of bringing about any structural changes within the sector: ‘The role of government in agriculture will be like in other sectors, limited to the provision of necessary services and infrastructure for efficient agricultural production.’\textsuperscript{62}

The strength and cohesion of the ruling party in the National Assembly has made it possible for those in power to implement their market-oriented development strategy rather undiluted. However, as demonstrated above, political considerations have guided the Government in several conjunctures. There has been a clear relationship between distributionist policies and the elections which have been held regularly every five years since 1969. Although BDP ministers have been responsive to society-centred forces, they have exhibited a bias towards economic elites. The existing inequalities suggest that the majority of the population, who it must be emphasised still live in the rural areas, only constitute a limited source of political pressure. Hence the future possibility, as might be expected in the context of a constitution safeguarding civic freedoms and multi-party competition, that one or more parties may emerge to represent the poorer segments of Botswana society, and challenge the economic strategy of the Government.

\textsuperscript{60} Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. pp. 283–92.


The 1994 elections demonstrated a noticeable decline in the relative support for the BDP, as shown in Table 1. However, the ruling party still secured 27 of the 40 elective seats in the National Assembly, thereby maintaining the comfortable majority it has enjoyed since 1969.

The continuing strength and prestige of the ruling party since independence suggests that its distributionist policies have been an effective instrument in mobilising political support. Despite a certain elite bias in the allocation of public funds, there is no doubt that the whole country has benefited from its diamond wealth. Considering the unstable macro-economic environment that people have to cope with elsewhere in Africa, it is reasonable to assume that the modest inflation rates are appreciated by the population, as well as the healthy and convertible Botswana currency, thereby contributing to the legitimacy of the Government.

Although President Masire does not personally appear to command quite the same traditional authority as did his predecessor, ethnicity has remained an important factor behind political loyalties in Botswana. Masire’s succession to the Presidency in 1980 has still not led to any noticeable decline in support for the ruling party in constituencies within the Bamangwato districts. Although the BDP in 1989 experienced a small decrease of some 4–5 per cent of the votes cast in Seretse Khama’s ethnic strongholds, it still received 70 per cent or more in 15 of the country’s 34 constituencies and maintained considerable support in others.63

However, the 1994 elections revealed that the process of economic development has generated a more complex set of demands on the BDP Government. Important socio-economic changes with political implications have taken place since independence. Rapid growth has led to diversification of old structures, more disparities have arisen between the rural and urban areas, and the skewed distribution of income has persisted. While support for the opposition was generated in the late 1960s by the frictions produced by the new democratic framework replacing traditional institutions, Parson argued in 1986 that the supremacy of the central government was no longer in question – ‘class politics’ had entered the political agenda, and ‘the

Table 1

Results of Elections Since Independence, Percentage of Votes Cast

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<tr>
<td>Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
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<td>Botswana National Front (BNF)</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
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<td>Botswana People’s Party (BPP)</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Botswana Independence Party (BIP)</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
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<td>Botswana Progressive Union (BPU)</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
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<td>Botswana Freedom Party (BFP)</td>
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<td>Botswana Labour Party (BLP)</td>
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<td>Independence Freedom Party (IFP)</td>
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<td>United Democratic Front (UDF)</td>
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<td>United Socialist Party (USP)</td>
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<td>Lesedi La Botswana (LLB)</td>
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Total number of votes: 76,858, 64,011, 134,496, 227,032, 250,487, 283,375.

Sources: Reports to the Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration on the general elections. \*Figures adjusted for the results of the by-election in Gaborone South. \*Figures adjusted for the results of the by-election in Thamanga.

politics of perceived inequality rather than the politics of shared poverty emerged as an issue’.64 Even so, most peasants remained loyal to the BDP in the 1994 elections.

Some Explanations for BDP Support

The basis of political loyalty rests on several factors. A number of studies reveal that almost all politicians, both at district and national levels, have been recruited from the wealthier segments of society.65 Parson claims there are mechanisms at work, notably patron-client relationships, that mediate the tensions one might expect to exist between richer and poorer rural households.66 For example, wealthier cattle holders sometimes help to plough the holdings of peasants, who may take charge of parts of their stock.67 Wage employment also seems to constitute a basis for ensuring that the beneficiaries support the

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64 Parson, op. cit. 1986, p. 56.
67 Estimates from the early 1970s presented by Harvey and Lewis, op. cit. p. 74, suggest that large cattle owners let peasants take care of between 10 and 20 per cent of the total national herd.
political preferences of economic élites, while the involvement of chiefs and headmen further helps to maintain the loyalty of the rural masses to the ruling party.

The BDP has several advantages vis-a-vis the opposition by virtue of being in power since independence, and by having a membership which provides financial resources and organisational talent. In addition to being in a position to adjust distributionist policies to the five-year cycle of elections, the activities of ministers, especially when they and other BDP politicians travel to constituencies, may be seen as a continuous ‘election campaign’. The ruling party has privileged access to the state-owned radio station and a daily newspaper, which puts opponents at a disadvantage. Picard claims that the BDP Government utilises the local administration, and especially district commissioners, to monitor opposition at the district level, and is thus able to respond to grievances when they emerge.68

The legal constraints on government employees who might wish to stand as candidates in the elections have almost inevitably limited the membership of the National Assembly to a relatively small group.69 A large proportion of the better educated Batswana work in the public sector, and they need to resign or secure leave of absence prior to seeking the support of voters. Civil servants who retire are, according to Picard, encouraged to join the BDP and take part in politics at both local and national levels.70 While undertaking research in Botswana in 1991 I found that at least 12 of the 16 Cabinet ministers had some prior experience as civil servants, as had six of the 20 BDP backbenchers. Holm claims that the risks associated with electoral defeat are greatest for candidates from the opposition, because the others have the backing of the party in power – moreover, those defeated may, for example, be nominated for one of the four ‘specially selected’ seats in the National Assembly.71

The opposition parties have access to less funds than the BDP, and are in general not as well organised. While most have distinct regional bases, the BNF is organised in most constituencies: it put up 39 candidates in 1994, more than double the number seeking to be elected in the 1970s. However, a survey conducted in 1984 found that BNF candidates felt they got less adequate support from their party than did their BDP competitors, and that all opposition candidates were

70 Picard, op. cit. p. 168.
71 Holm, loc. cit. For example, BDP candidates became ‘specially selected’ MPs after being defeated by the leader of the BNF in 1984 and 1989, respectively.
required to spend more of their personal means in the campaign.\textsuperscript{72} Unlike parties to the left of the political spectrum in many countries, there is neither any formal co-operation between trade unions and opposition parties in Botswana, nor any close link to one or more privately owned newspapers.

The weak position of the opposition prior to the 1994 elections cannot be attributed only to the inherently strong position of the BDP and the single-member, winner-take-all electoral system. The BIP, the BPP, and the BNF have since 1969 competed among themselves for seats in several constituencies, with another three minor parties joining the race in 1989. Without this infighting the opposition might have won ten instead of six seats in 1984, and eight instead of three in 1989. Although far from being capable of challenging the BDP in terms of governmental power, an opposition with one-fourth of the seats in the National Assembly would at least be more potent in criticising the actions of the Government, and perhaps succeed in influencing public policy-making more than is the case today.

An attempt was made in 1991 to create an umbrella organisation of the opposition parties, named the People’s Progressive Front (PPF), which almost immediately suffered a set-back when Daniel Kwele, who had been one of its main promoters, died that same year. The 1994 elections demonstrated that those who wish to defeat the BDP have still not become unified – indeed, four seats were lost as a result of both old and new opposition parties competing in the same constituencies. But the support for BNF from more than one-third of the voters suggests that a two-party system may materialise in the future.

THE ADVANCE OF POLITICAL PLURALISM?

The left versus right dimension, if any, in Botswana politics is often very ambiguous when political programmes, speeches, parliamentary debates, and the socio-economic background of the founders/leaders/supporters of the various parties are considered. Ideologies matter far less than personal antagonisms from the 1960s, partly rooted in ethnic loyalties.\textsuperscript{73} However, certain differences have emerged between the BDP and the main opposition party, the BNF,\textsuperscript{74} and Patrick

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid. pp. 45 and 47, Tables 8-9.
Molutsi, for example, concluded in 1989 that 'the two programmes are substantially different in their approach to the solutions to the issues of economic growth, unemployment, housing etc.'  

The most frequently mentioned issues in 1974 were the need for more educational facilities, the provision of water and loans to farmers, and infrastructural development and health facilities. Cohen observed that in terms of economic development, the candidates were basically concerned with the provision of more 'amenities', and that 'Issues of economic strategy do not seem to be troubling the candidates'.  

Gloria Masale stated that they were mostly concerned with drought and unemployment in 1984, and was surprised to discover, given the prevailing turbulent situation in Southern Africa, that there was a general ignorance about foreign policy problems.  

In a survey conducted in 1987, Gloriah Somolekae found that two-thirds of the 1,297 respondents were unaware of any differences between the BDP and the BNF, including even half of those with a post-secondary education. About one-fifth of the respondents claimed that they supported a certain party because of its ideological basis or policy towards particular issues, although the main reason given was merely a general 'like' or 'dislike' for one party as against another. These findings seem to be supported by the 1994 elections, since a number of earlier claims/revelations had produced press coverage which linked several BDP ministers to economic mismanagement. Confirmed or not, it appears that these incidents contributed to a protest vote against the Government. In other words, the 1994 success of the BNF does not necessarily reflect mainly a preference for its political programme, but a further 'dislike' having developed against the BDP.  

Given that voters in Botswana are not much concerned with ideology per se, there are some differences with respect to how they perceive the two largest parties which go beyond ethnic affiliations or distribution of public funds. The BDP seems to be increasingly viewed as representing the better-off, while the BNF has established a support based among the growing number of urban dwellers in low-paid wage employment. One telling example is Selebi-Phikwe, which emerged out

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75 Patrick Molutsi in Mmegi (Gaborone), 6–12 October 1989, p. 2.  
76 Cohen, loc. cit. p. 264.  
77 Masale, op. cit. pp. 8–9.  
of the development of the copper/nickel mines after independence, and became a constituency of its own for the first time in 1984, when captured by the BDP with 64.5 per cent of the votes. Although most of those employed in the mines come from the surrounding Bamangwato area, an ethnic stronghold of the ruling party, the BDP retained this seat in 1989 with 49.5 per cent of the votes, and would have lost to the BNF if 170 votes for the BPP had not split the opposition.

In the 1994 elections, 58.4 per cent of the voters in Selebi-Phikwe supported the BNF, which also won all of the four Gaborone constituencies, as well as 24 of the 25 seats in the City Council, with similar majorities in the Town Councils of Lobatse and Selebi-Phikwe.81 This suggests that the urban support base for the BNF extends beyond the low-income groups increasingly to embrace the middle class.

CONCLUSION

The regularity of competitive elections and the need for maintaining political support have induced the Government to be responsive to the interests of various segments of Botswana society. However, although both the rural and urban poor have benefited, at least to some extent, from the BDP's public-sector policies – for example, social services and physical infrastructure – there has certainly been a bias in spending towards economic élites. Unemployment and poverty remain serious problems, especially in the rural areas. Reference has been made to various factors that help to explain why the opposition parties have been slow to take advantage of the structural deficiencies, and gain prominence in politics at the national level, and why the BDP has been able to carry out its economic strategy rather successfully. The stable majority rule of the ruling party and the weakness of the opposition have made it possible for the Government to be selective in its response to political demands, and organised pressures have not made those in power feel compelled to involve the state more directly in productive activities.

It is obvious that other factors apart from distributionist policies have been important in maintaining support for the BDP, including ethnic loyalties and mechanisms for mediating potential tensions, especially in the rural areas. This notwithstanding, the main opposition party, the BNF, has been able to mobilise support since the 1980s,

81 Report to the Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration on the General Election, 1994 (Gaborone, 1994).
initially among the less privileged in the urban centres, but increasingly from a wider range of society. Although the ruling party has continued to receive the majority of votes, its support has recently even decreased in BDP ethnic strongholds. It seems justified to conclude that democratic institutions in Botswana act as the kind of invaluable ‘meter’ of political support that has been absent in other African countries. It remains to be seen how the Government will respond to the challenging political signals, and whether or not the BNF will become more effective in policy-making after its success in the 1994 elections.