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Chieftainship (Bogosi) Endures Despite Democratic Consolidation in Botswana

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1. Introduction

At face value, the term democratic consolidation appears to suggest that the democratic process has reached an end point where political change to other forms of rule (e.g. single party, military) is highly unlikely. In contrast to the view of democratic consolidation as an end point, we need to understand it as the evolution and institutionalisation of democratic processes. Although Botswana is considered a front runner in its institutionalization of democratic politics, Botswana's democracy is far from perfect. Botswana is an example of a country for which the process of democratic consolidation is still ongoing.

This briefing paper focuses on Botswana's support for democracy, and the extent to which such support could be attributed to strengthening of democracy in Botswana. It also focuses on the constitution as a symbol of republicanism and foundation of democratic rule. In particular, the following explores the relationship between the support for democracy, institutionalized democratic institutions and existence of the *bogosi* (chieftainship) as a social and political institution.

Botswana is widely acclaimed as a successful model of democracy in Africa. Whilst a number of African countries overturned their independence constitutions, which provided for some multiparty competition, and replaced them with one party system, Botswana remained resolute in its adherence to a multiparty system. In those years, it was characterised as a beacon of democracy in a racially polarized and politically turbulent region.

One important reason for Botswana's political stability is that the independence constitution crafted a judicious balance between republican and traditional systems of governance. In pre-colonial times, Botswana were ruled by *dikgosi* (chiefs), and *bogosi* was hereditary. The *kgosi* (chief) presided over the *kgotla* (village assembly or parliament) in which people deliberated on public policy and issues of governance. The independence constitution established a republican government based on the Westminster parliamentary system. The new constitution established a national assembly based on a unicameral parliamentary system with parliament as the only legislative house. A second chamber, known as *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* (House of Chiefs), was also

established and comprised of *dikgosi* (chiefs) of the various ethnic groups that make up the nation-state of Botswana. The *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* (House of Chiefs) was not given legislative powers, and it serves only in an advisory capacity. Botswana's exceptional stability as a democratic state derives, in part, from the blending and interaction of traditional and republican institutions. For instance, the *kgotla* (village assembly) stands out as an effective forum for public consultation between government and the people (Lekorwe, 1989).

The apparent contradiction is that the two institutions -- republican and traditional -- represent different value systems and institutional structures that require different methods of democratic oversight and accountability. At a basic level, republican institutions require elections as a system of change of government and office bearers have a limited term of office. *Bogosi*, on the other hand, is hereditary and although some *dikgosi* (chiefs) assume office through elections, *dikgosi* do not have term limits. As a result, *bogosi* may be viewed as undemocratic. The following examines how Botswana views the paradox of parallel and interacting institutions of republican (democratic) and traditional rule.

2. Afrobarometer Surveys

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and sharing research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as five rounds of surveys have taken place from 1999 to 2013.

Afrobarometer surveys use a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries and over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 1,200 adult Botswana selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Botswana citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Botswana was conducted by the Southern African Barometer research team at the University of Botswana between 30 June and 11 July 2012. Previous Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Botswana in 1999 (Round 1), 2003 (Round 2), 2005 (Round 3), and 2008 (Round 4).

3. Measuring Support for Democratic and Traditional Institutions

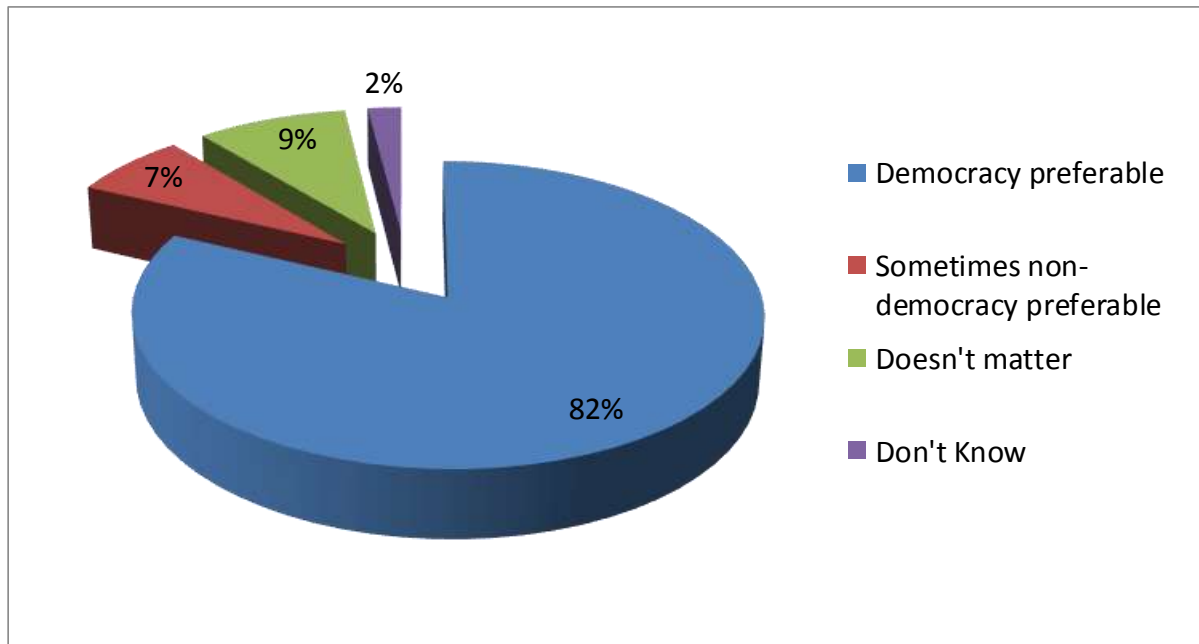
Inquiring about democracy, the Afrobarometer asks respondents about their support for democracy. Respondents choose between three statements: (1) “democracy is preferable to any other kind of government”; (2) “in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable”; (3) “for someone like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have.” A separate question provides more detail about citizens’ support for alternative ways to govern a country, specifically one party rule, military rule and one man rule. The intent is to determine the extent to which those who support democracy accept or reject non-democratic alternatives. The Afrobarometer also asks questions pertaining to traditional governance. In one question, respondents indicate whether the *bogosi* supports democratic institutions and should be retained, or it is not useful in a democratic system and should be abolished. The questions pertaining to democratic and traditional institutions help establish how many of those who support democracy also support *bogosi*.

In this briefing paper, the main interest is to test support for democracy, which suggests that as democracy is institutionalised, educated and urbanised people would identify more with modern democratic institutions and less with traditional institutions. The expectation is that after four decades of institutionalising republican/democratic institutions, norms and practices, traditional institutions would recede and play a less significant role in Botswana politics. Interestingly, the results of the latest Afrobarometer survey do not support this expectation.

4. Support for Democracy and Non-democratic Alternatives

The survey results show that an overwhelming majority of Botswana support democracy. 82% felt that democracy is a preferable form of government (Figure 1). Only 7% felt that in some circumstances a non-democratic government would be preferable, and 9% felt that it does not matter to them which type of government is in place.

Figure 1: Botswana's Preference for Democracy



Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

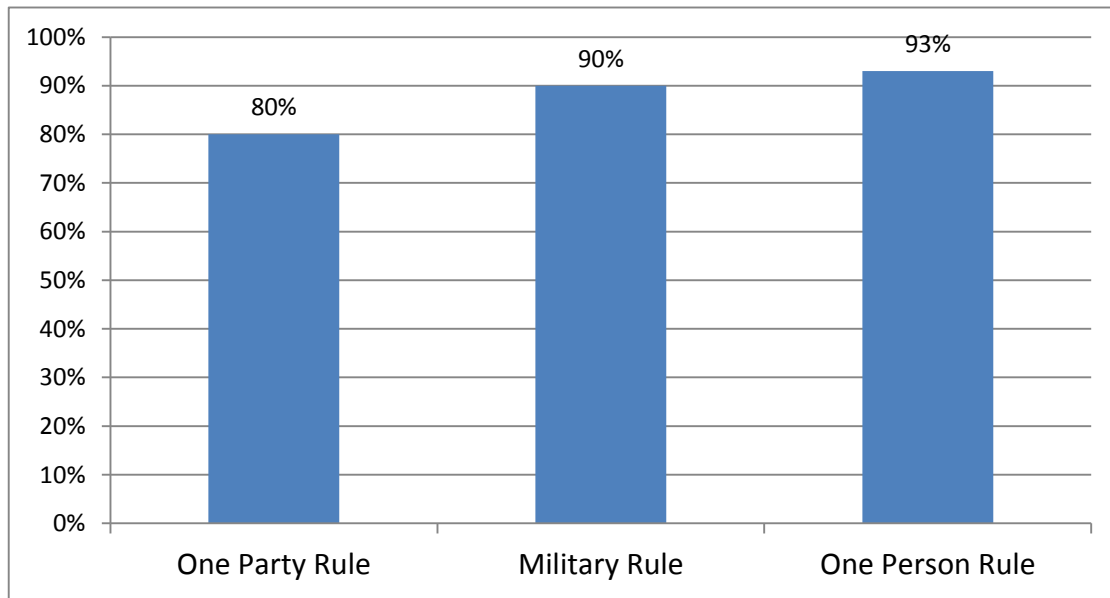
Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

Conventional comparative politics literature suggests that when people become increasingly educated and urbanized, they would support democratic institutions and identify less with traditional institutions (Apter, 1965; Lerner, 1958; Pye, 1966; Welch, 1971). Interestingly, there is overwhelming support for democracy across the demographic divide, with semi-urban dwellers and less educated being slightly more supportive of democracy. 79% of respondents in urban, 86% in semi-urban and 81% in rural areas support democracy. Those with no formal education top the list with 84%, followed by those with post-secondary education with 83% and those with primary and secondary with 82%.¹ Botswana appear to support democracy irrespective of their locality and level of education.

The Afrobarometer also inquires about citizens' support for non-democratic methods of governance. This allows for a comparison between the results pertaining to the general support for democracy and specific non-democratic alternatives: one party rule, military rule, and one man rule (Figure 2).

¹ These differences are all within the margin of error (+/-3%).

Figure 2: Botswana's Rejection of Alternatives to Democracy



Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (% of respondents indicating disapprove or strongly disapprove reported for each statement)

A. Only one party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?

B. The army comes in to govern the country?

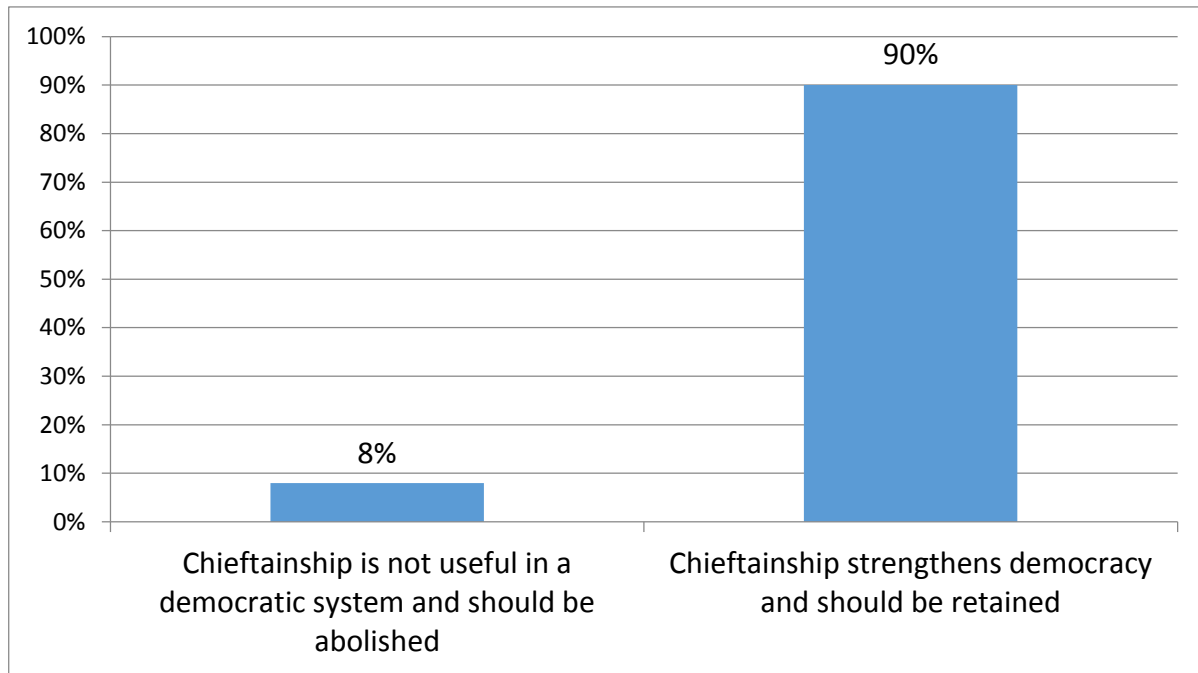
C. Elections and the National Assembly are abolished so that the president can decide everything?

Affirming their support for democracy, 80% of the respondents rejected one party rule. When disaggregated by locality and education, there are only small differences in terms of the level of rejection of one party rule. 76% in rural areas, 82% in semi-urban and 83% in urban areas disapproved one party rule. Across education groups, there are significant differences. 91% of those with post-secondary education and 68% of those without formal education rejected one party rule. The second part of the question addressed military rule. Rejection of military rule is high at 90%, and the sentiment is shared by those in urban (94%), semi-rural (91%) and rural (90%) areas. This belief is irrespective of the level of education: no formal education (88%), primary school (91%), secondary school (91%) and postsecondary (96%). The survey also shows distaste for one person rule at 93%. In rejection of one person rule urban areas scored 94%, semi-urban 92% and rural 91%.

Turning to traditional rule of the *bogosi*, Botswana were asked to state their position on two perspectives. Respondents had to choose between two statements: “*Bogosi* or chieftainship as an institution is outdated and is no longer useful in the democratic system and should therefore be abolished,” and “*Bogosi* or chieftainship is part of our value system and our culture and helps to strengthen our democracy.” The results reflected in Figure 3 shows that Botswana overwhelmingly support *bogosi* as relevant and significant to their lives. They view it as an important part of their value system and culture that must be nurtured and supported. The survey findings reveal an overwhelming majority, 90%, in support of *bogosi*, with only 8% opposing its existence. Support is extremely high amongst the rural Botswana with 94% supporting its existence followed by 90% of semi-urban and 88% of urban dwellers. The sentiments remain the

same across education levels. 94% with no formal education, 91% with primary education and 86% with post-secondary also advocate the retention of *bogosi*.

Figure 3: Overwhelming Support for Bogosi in Botswana



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: Bogosi or Chieftainship as an institution is outdated and is no longer useful in the democratic system and should therefore be abolished. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)

Statement 2: Bogosi or Chieftainship is part of our value system and culture and helps to strengthen our democracy, it should therefore be retained. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)

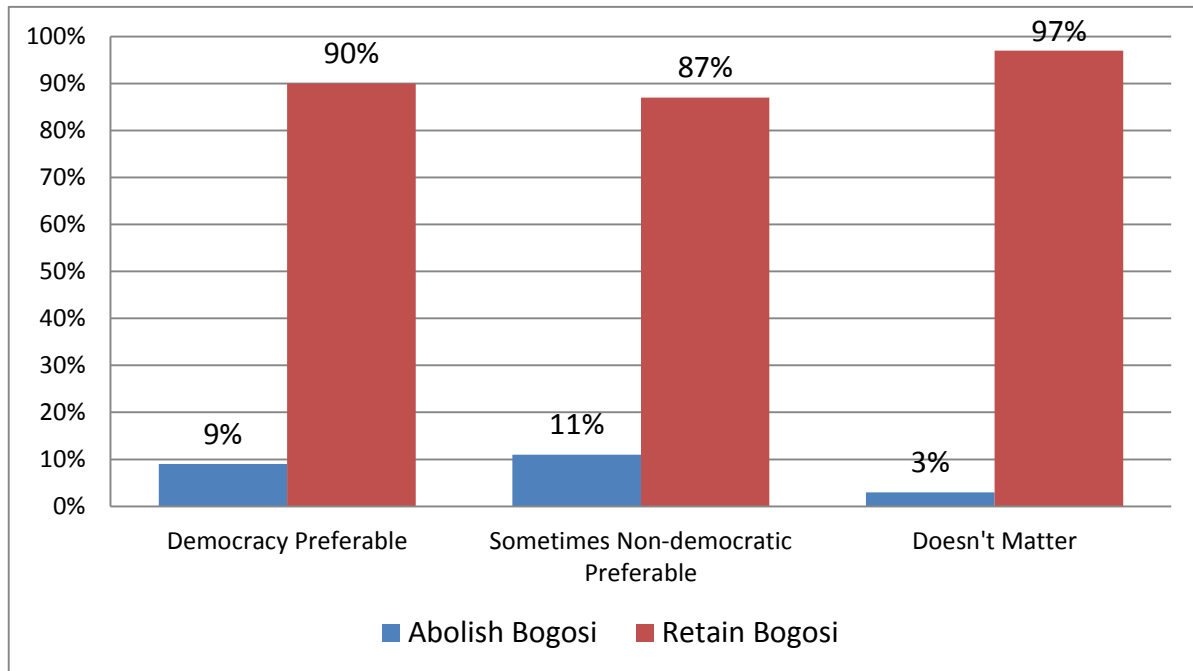
5. The Paradox of Democracy-Bogosi Nexus

Bogosi has also been a subject of political and public debate in recent times. The comparative politics literature of the 1950s and 1960s (Leaner, 1958; Apter, 1965) suggests that countries experiencing political development must transcend their primordial traditional loyalties and embrace modern intuitions. According to one view, as an increasing number of people receive Western education and become more urbanised, it would be possible for people to abandon traditional political organization. Institutions such as *bogosi* and the *kgotla* (village assembly) were to give way to other institutions, such as political parties, parliaments, and courts.

Under this aforementioned view, there is a tension between traditional and republican institutions in which the forms of institutions are in opposition to each other. It is expected that people who prefer democracy as the best form of government would identify less with *bogosi* as it is perceived to be an undemocratic institution. Alternatively, it is expected that those who say sometimes “non-democratic government can be preferred” and those who say “it doesn’t matter” would be potentially more likely support the retention of *bogosi*. However, empirical evidence

suggests the opposite. 90% of respondents who say that democracy is a preferable form of government, also say *bogosi* should be retained (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Democracy-Bogosi Paradox



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: Bogosi or Chieftainship as an institution is outdated and is no longer useful in the democratic system and should therefore be abolished. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)

Statement 2: Bogosi or Chieftainship is part of our value system and culture and helps to strengthen our democracy, it should therefore be retained. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)

Question: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

7. Conclusion

Conventional wisdom suggests that as more people live in an urban setting and obtain education, they will transcend traditional loyalties and be less supportive of traditional institutions. However, recent survey results from Botswana do not support this thesis. Paradoxically, overwhelming majorities support both democracy and chieftainship. Perhaps the evidence in this analysis illustrates how traditionalism and modernity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Contrary to views that traditional institutions would pass away, Botswana perceives traditional institutions as parallel and even supportive of democratic institutions. Moreover, the survey evidence suggests that *bogosi* has been able to re-invent itself to be responsive to contemporary challenges and justify its authority alongside democratic institutions. The blending of traditional and democratic institutions is most likely a key factor that accounts for Botswana's relative

political stability. It is clear that Batswana view traditional institutions as reinforcing democracy rather than being in opposition to democracy.

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The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa (IJR), the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Survey implementation in Afrobarometer's work in Namibia is coordinated by the Institute for Public Policy Research. We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank for Afrobarometer Round 5.

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