

# AFRO BAROMETER

Afrobarometer Paper No.14

**PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD  
DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE,  
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
IN BOTSWANA**

Mogopodi Lekorwe, Mpho Molomo, Wilford  
Molefe, and Kabelo Moseki

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
and civil society in Africa.**



The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)  
6 Spin Street, Church Square  
Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
27 21 461 2559 • fax: 27 21 461 2589  
Mattes (bob@idasact.org.za)

Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana)  
14 West Airport Residential Area  
P.O. Box 404, Legon-Accra, Ghana  
233 21 776 142 • fax: 233 21 763 028  
Gyimah-Boadi (cdd@ghana.com)

Michigan State University (MSU)  
Department of Political Science  
East Lansing, Michigan 48824  
517 353 3377 • fax: 517 432 1091  
Bratton (mbratton@msu.edu)

afrobarometer.org

AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

**Afrobarometer Paper No 14.**

**PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE,  
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
IN BOTSWANA**

By: Mogopodi Lekorwe, Mpho Molomo,  
Wilford Molefe, and Kabelo Moseki.

October 2001

\*Mogopodi Lekorwe is a senior lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Administrative Studies at The University of Botswana , as well as Program Officer for CESPAM (Centre of Specialisation in Public Administration and Management). Mpho Molomo is chairperson of the Department of Political Science and Administrative Studies at The University of Botswana. Wiford Molefe and Kabelo Moseki are both lecturers in the Department of Statistics at The University of Botswana.

*For supporting research, capacity-building and publication, we are grateful to the Regional Center for Southern Africa of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID/RCSA) and to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)*

## AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

Co-Editors: Michael Bratton, E. Gyimah-Boadi, and Robert Mattes

The Afrobarometer Series, launched in October 1999, reports the results of national sample surveys on the attitudes of citizens in selected African countries towards democracy, markets and other aspects of development. The Afrobarometer is a joint enterprise of Michigan State University (MSU), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, Ghana). Afrobarometer papers are simultaneously co-published by these partner institutions. The objective of the Afrobarometer is to collect, analyze and disseminate cross-national, time-series attitudinal data for up to a dozen new democracies on the African continent.

Copies of Working Papers are available for \$15.00 each plus applicable tax, shipping and handling charges.

Orders may be directed to:

IDASA POS  
6 Spin Street, Church Square  
Cape Town 8001 SOUTH AFRICA  
(phone: 27 21 461 5229, fax: 27 21 461 2589, e-mail: [tanya@idasact.org.za](mailto:tanya@idasact.org.za))

An invoice will be sent

Publications List

***AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS***

- No.1 Bratton, Michael and Robert Mattes, “Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?” 1999.
- No.2 Bratton, Michael, Peter Lewis and E. Gyimah-Boadi, “Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Ghana,” 1999.
- No.3 Lewis, Peter M. and Michael Bratton, “Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Nigeria,” 2000.
- No.4 Bratton, Michael, Gina Lambright and Robert Sentamu, “Democracy and Economy in Uganda: A Public Opinion Perspective,” 2000.
- No.5 Bratton, Michael and Robert Mattes, “Democratic and Market Reforms in Africa: What ‘the People’ Say,” 2000.
- No.6 Bratton, Michael and Gina Lambright, “Uganda’s Referendum 2000: The Silent Boycott,” 2001.
- No.7 Mattes, Robert, Yul Derek Davids, Cherrel Africa and Michael Bratton, “Public Opinion and the Consolidation of Democracy in Southern Africa,” July 2000.
- No.8 Mattes, Robert, Yul Derek Davids and Cherrel Africa, “Views of Democracy in South Africa and the Region: Trends and Comparisons,” October 2000.
- No. 9 Bratton, Michael, Massa Coulibaly and Fabiana Machado, “Popular Perceptions of Good Governance in Mali,” March 2000.
- No.10 Bratton, Michael and Robert Mattes, “Popular Economic Values and Economic Reform in Southern Africa,” 2001.
- No. 12 Chikwanha-Dzenga, Annie Barbara, Eldred Masunungure, and Nyasha Madingira, “Democracy and National Governance in Zimbabwe: A Country Survey Report.” 2001.
- No. 13 Gay, John and Thuso Green. “Citizen Perceptions of Democracy, Governance, And Political Crisis in Lesotho.” 2001.

## **Abstract**

Botswana is the longest surviving democracy in Southern Africa, which others often seek to emulate. In order to observe popular satisfaction with democratisation, an Afrobarometer survey was conducted in Botswana in 2000. The results reflect long-standing democratic values and the firm entrenchment of democratic institutions. Botswana demonstrate their satisfaction with democracy and the legitimacy of the state by claiming that the government exercises power within legal means and equally represents the interests of all citizens. Few Botswana, however, taken an interest in politics or civic affairs, yet they can generally identify their political leaders. Interestingly, most Botswana indicate their personal economic conditions are worsening as well as those of the economy as a whole. The survey reveals that although Botswana are generally content, problems of political participation and economic distribution still need attention.

## ***Background and Context***

The past two decades have ushered in various democratisation processes in almost all Southern African countries. Many of these processes are incomplete while others have reversed their progress. Even though a number of them have conducted what can be termed free and fair elections, democracy still remains fragile within the region.

Thus, Southern African states are at varying stages of the democratisation process. They range from fully functioning, competitive electoral democracies to “semi” democracies (Diamond, 1996), “pseudo,” or “virtual” democracies (Joseph, 1998). Along with Mauritius, Botswana is hailed as one of the oldest and most stable democracies within the region (Du Toit, 1995). While analyses focusing solely on constitutional protections, institutions and institutional performance are important to understand this record of democratic performance, it is equally important to understand the political attitudes and behavioural predispositions of Botswana towards their political and economic system.

We need to assess the extent to which Botswana understand and appreciate the term democracy. Do they perceive it in intrinsic or instrumental terms? Do they, in fact, think they are governed democratically? Do they engage in activities that promote or inhibit the further development of democracy? And are they committed to democracy to the extent that would defend it if it came under threat?

In order to answer these and many other questions, researchers at the University of Botswana in collaboration with the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, and the Afrobarometer Network surveyed a nationally representative, stratified, clustered, probability sample of 1,200 Botswana about their attitudes towards democracy, governance, and economic development. Interviews were conducted during November and December 1999. All interviews were done face to face and in the home language of the respondent.<sup>1</sup> This report presents some basic statistics with regard to public attitudes towards democracy, governance and economic development in Botswana. We also venture into some preliminary analysis and interpretation of the results. More in-depth and sophisticated analysis will be done in various follow up papers.

Applied survey research of this nature can yield an abundance of information useful both to analysts and scholars as well government decision-makers. Accurate information can help policy-makers make informed decisions and policy choices to implement improvements that respond to citizens needs and preferences (Folz, 1996). More specifically, the data from this survey can help policy makers at each stage of the policy process: formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

Policy formulation in many instances involves choices of what to do or not to do. Applied survey research can help policy makers determine what people need, want, prefer, or demand from them. Such information can be used to make choices, set priorities, and translate popular demands into public policy. This data can also help government officials and politicians decide how best to deliver or provide services. Lastly, this information can provide a useful feedback for evaluation of government

policies and programmes. However efficient a department may claim to be, citizen satisfaction is the real challenge that confronts many policy-makers.

### ***The Political Situation in Botswana***

The beginning of the new millennium is an important period for the consolidation of democracy in Botswana. It is a time to celebrate the achievements of the past thirty years as well as confront the challenges of the future. The close of the millennium will be remembered for the advancements that were made on the democratic front. It marked the end of one party rule and advent of multi-party politics in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia. Perhaps more significantly, it marked the end of apartheid in South Africa and the end of South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia. Yet Southern Africa has also retreated back to conflict with the outbreak of the civil war in Congo-Kinshasa and the resurgence of conflict in Angola.

While democracy has been a fragile species in many African countries, it has blossomed in Botswana. It has a unique record in Southern Africa as the country that adhered to multi-party democracy when other countries moved toward one party regimes. Regular elections, consistently deemed 'free and fair' have manifested that resilience. The bedrock of Botswana's democracy is embedded in the traditional Kgotla system. The Kgotla is a time tested forum where issues of public policy are discussed openly by the community (Holm and Molutsi, 1989). In a measure to widen the frontiers of democracy, in 1997 Botswana instituted electoral reforms that created an Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 years, and created an absentee ballot. Currently, there is a raging debate on reforming the electoral system to make the composition of parliament more reflective of the popular vote.

In its three decades of independence, Botswana has become a model of a working democracy. The constitution of Botswana created an executive presidency in which the President is both Head of State and Government. It provides for a unicameral legislature based on the Westminster parliamentary system in which Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected on the 'First-Past-The-Post' (FPTP) or 'winner-take-all' electoral system. There is also a lower chamber consisting of 15 non-elected members of the House of Chiefs that advises government on traditional and customary issues. It is the interface of these two institutions and the populace that has defined Botswana's democratic practice.

Botswana has now held eight 'free and fair' elections, though there has never been a turnover in party control of government. Table 1 below shows that the FPTP system has produced a predominant party system in which the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has won each and every election by a landslide victory (at least in terms of legislative seats). Only in 1994 did the opposition Botswana National Front (BNF) project itself as a serious contender for political power by winning 13 out of 40 parliamentary seats. From 1984 to 1994, the BNF had recorded a steady growth in the popular vote, only to drop by 12 percent in the popular vote in 1999, with just 6 parliamentary seats due to a party split and the formation of the new Botswana Congress Party (BCP). Were it not for that split, there was every indication that it would do well in

the 1999 election. However, as it is, the opposition remains weak and ineffective (Molomo, 2000).

*Table 1: Party Support, 1965 – 1999 (Number of Seats)*

Party	1965	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999
<b>BDP</b>	28	24	27	29	28	31	27	33
<b>BNF</b>	-	3	2	2	5	3	13	6
<b>BPP</b>	3	3	2	1	1	0	0	-
<b>BIP/IFP</b>	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	-
<b>BCP</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
<b>BAM</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
<b>MELS</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
<b>Total Seats</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

*Table 2: Party Support, 1965 – 1999 (Percentage of Popular Vote)*

Party	1965	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999
<b>BDP</b>	80	68	77	75	68	65	55	54
<b>BNF</b>	-	14	12	13	20	27	37	25
<b>BPP</b>	14	12	6	8	7	4	4	-
<b>BIP/IFP</b>	5	6	4	4	3	2	4	-
<b>BCP</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
<b>BAM</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
<b>Other</b>	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	0
<b>Rejected</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The electoral fortunes of the BDP can be explained in part by the winner-take-all electoral system but also by the strong alliance it has cultivated among the *Bangwato* (the people of the Central District, the most populous district, that accounts for 14 of the 40 parliamentary constituencies). The decision by Ian Khama Seretse Khama to enter politics was widely applauded by *Bangwato*.

Following the BNF's electoral gains in 1994, the BDP engaged a consultant, Lawrence Schlemmer to map out a strategy for the future. Schlemmer (1997:3) recommended that the BDP would increase its chances of winning the 1999 elections by not only honourably retiring some of the old guard but also bringing into the party a person with 'sufficient dynamism' who was untainted by factional fights. The appointment of Ian Khama Seretse Khama, the eldest son of the first President, Sir Seretse Khama, to Vice-President was seen as the right move to inspire stability and to recapture the electoral support the BDP appeared to be losing. The retirement of Sir Ketumile Masire and the ascendance to power of Festus Mogae was also part of this grand strategy. But it is not clear whether the BDP won the 1999 election on account of Khama's influence or the split in the opposition.

President Mogae's conduct in public office has also been the subject of serious debate. The most contentious case was his declaration of a State of Emergency in 1999 following the issuance of the election writ but before the IEC had completed the certification of the voters roll. Had he not declared the State of Emergency in order to reconstitute



Parliament and enable it to amend the electoral law, 66,000 voters would have been disenfranchised. Nevertheless, Mogae accepted the blame amidst charges that he was “careless, inconsistent, very haphazard...and displaying poor concentration” (*Botswana Gazette*, 1999:2).

Another notable incident was his unprecedented 1999 decision to grant Khama 12 months sabbatical leave, a move widely opposed by MPs and Members of Cabinet. In addition, Mogae did not appoint an acting Vice-President during his leave; Khama continued as Vice-President throughout his absence from office. And whenever Mogae left the country, Khama was recalled from leave to act as President. Finally, when it became clear that government was beset by lack of implementation capacity, Khama was recalled from the controversial sabbatical and given increased powers to oversee other ministries. All these moves appeared to be votes of no confidence by Mogae in the members of his Cabinet. What is more worrying is that in his short term in office, Khama has revealed himself as someone with contempt for established procedures, flaunting the long established tradition of *Therisanyo* (consultation) upon which the BDP is based. The most cogent example was his unilateral decision to abolish the Tirelo Sechaba Scheme (National Service).

Economically, Botswana has won praise as a successful capitalist model in Sub-Saharan Africa. From a humble beginning as one of the poorest countries in the world when it attained independence in 1966, Botswana has recorded one of the highest growth rates in the world. This was made possible by the discovery and exploitation of minerals, especially diamonds. Yet growth has been accompanied by growing poverty and inequalities in income and unemployment especially in rural areas. Unemployment, lack of housing, poor services and crime also afflict urban areas. Rising levels of HIV/AIDS compound these societal ills. At current infection rates, HIV prevalence was anticipated to rise to 270,000 by the year 2000 (Lesetedi, 1999: 50). With a population of just 1.5 million, this is alarmingly high.

### ***Consolidating Democracy In Botswana***

Scholars have adopted a number of approaches to the study of young democracies. This study adopts the premise posited by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan that democracy can only be said to be consolidated if it is widely accepted by a majority of people as “the only game in town.” This happens when citizens choose democracy as the most preferable form of government over other regimes.

Botswana’s success story as a liberal democratic system is anchored in the performance of its institutions, particularly holding regular free and fair elections. However other scholars have also pointed to its strong economy and prudent economic management, the quality of its leadership, and its democratic culture. Yet Botswana also presents somewhat of a paradox in that other important characteristics that are usually said to account for the resilience of a well functioning democracy seem to be weak or non-existent. Botswana has never experienced a turnover in party control of government, it

has a weak opposition, and a weak civil society with declining levels of participation in civic activities.

Focussing on this last characteristic, Botswana's civil society is confronted with a lack of human and financial resources. First of all, there is no group political culture where leaders are expected to agree on a course of action which they then present to the public. Historically, group activity has had no role outside of Tswana political structures: the community was organised around the chief and most political communication revolved around the Kgotla. Normally civil society is said to develop as a countervailing force to the state. In Botswana, however, they developed in parallel. Another important obstacle is the fact that many educated citizens work for government, parastatals or the civil service and therefore not allowed to participate in political activities. Many citizens therefore avoid engaging in partisan politics because the costs of doing so are higher than the prospective benefits.

Thus, this Afrobarometer survey assesses the extent to which democratic norms are embraced in Botswana. What do Botswana understand as democracy? Do they perceive the concept in intrinsic or instrumental terms? Indeed, do they think they are governed democratically? Do they engage in activities that promote democracy, or is their support for democracy passive, attested only by voting in periodic elections? Finally, if democracy came under threat, would Botswana be prepared to defend it?

In order to answer this, and many other questions, researchers at the University of Botswana in collaboration with the Institute for Democracy in South Africa and the Afrobarometer Network surveyed a nationally representative, stratified, clustered probability sample of 1,200 Botswana about their attitudes towards democracy, governance and economic development. Interviews were conducted between November and December 1999. All interviews were done face to face and in the home language of the respondent (for more information on survey methodology, see Appendix A).

## *Consolidation Of Democracy*

This section yields the following findings:

- A large majority in Botswana (82 percent) say that democracy is always preferable.
- In Botswana, democracy is most frequently understood as participation in decision-making (e.g. “government by the people”). One third of Botswana (34 percent) gave this response. Civil liberties and freedoms are the second most frequently mentioned response (30 percent).
- By overwhelming margins, Botswana disapprove of non-democratic alternatives. Eighty six percent disapprove of dictatorial, presidential rule; 85 percent reject military rule; 78 percent reject the idea of a one party state; 74 percent disapprove of traditional rule on a national basis; and 71 percent disapprove of a return to British colonialism.
- Botswana is the only country within the survey where more than a simple majority (54 percent) see their last election as completely democratic.
- Forty six percent say that the way Botswana is governed is “completely democratic” far more than in any of the other countries surveyed.

### *Support for Democracy*

Democracy is a disputed term. Much of the debate on democracy is informed by the liberal paradigm which conceptualises it in terms of the existence of civil and political rights. However, there have been debates in Africa over the need for a shift in paradigm that begins to articulate a different set of assumptions in defining democracy. As succinctly pointed out by Bratton and Mattes (1999:4), “as citizens in the non-western world strive to make democracy their own, they reshape it, imparting cultural norms” that shape its direction and destiny. Ideas of how to define and reformulate democracy are determined by the concrete historical and material circumstances that exist in a polity. As a result, democracy is a product of universal ideals but also fashioned by concrete realities.

There are two basic paradigms which define democracy: the intrinsic and the instrumental views (Rose et al,1998; Diamond, 1999). In the intrinsic model, people see democracy as political and civic rights. In the instrumental view, people view democracy in terms of its substantive outcomes, usually favourable economic outcomes. Yet another school of thought sees multi-party competition as the *sine qua non* (a sufficient condition) of democracy.

To establish levels of support for democracy in Botswana, we asked respondents to tell us which of the following statements they agree with most: A. Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government; B. In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable to democratic government; C. For someone like me, a democratic or non-democratic regime makes no difference. An overwhelming majority (82 percent) of Botswana say that democracy is always preferable; this is the highest level measured in

Southern Africa. This powerful and apparently unqualified preference for a democratic regime suggests that democracy in Botswana may be consolidating.

*Table 3: Support for Democracy*

	Responses
Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.	82%
In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable to democratic government.	7%
For someone like me, a democratic or non-democratic regime makes no difference.	6%
Don't know	3%

We asked a question to determine further whether democracy is indeed “the only game in town.” The premise of the question was: “Sometimes democracy does not work.” The interviewer then proceeded to ask: “When this happens, some people say that we need a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections. Others say that even when things don’t work, democracy is always best.” Respondents were asked to choose between these two positions. Again, even under apparently difficult circumstances, the vast majority of Botswana still feel there is no place for an unelected leader. While there is a reduction of seventeen percentage points from the previous question, 65 percent agree that democracy is always best. 29 percent agree that if democracy is not working, they would prefer a strong, unelected leader.

### *The Meaning of Democracy*

Despite the fact that Botswana is considered an old democracy in the region, we wanted to find out what Botswana understood by the term democracy? Sometimes the meaning of the word is culturally misplaced and outsiders often impose a given meaning. People were asked, “What if anything, do you understand by the word democracy? What comes to mind when you hear the word?”

93 percent were able to provide an answer, but this reduced drastically to 28 percent for a second definition. Just eight percent could provide a third. In their first reply, 69 percent provided a positive meaning of the term. However, it should be noted that the question used the Setswana translation of the word “democracy:” which might have assisted some respondents in answering the questions.

*Table 4: Awareness of the Term "Democracy"*

	Positive Meanings	Negative meanings	Null/Neutral Meanings
Those who supply a meaning - First Response	69%	<1%	24%
Those who supply a meaning - Second Response	27%	<1%	1%
Those who supply a meaning - Third Response	8%	0%	<1%

Another way of uncovering a perceived definition of democracy is to give to them a series of procedural elements normally associated with the term. We asked them to say

which of these elements they considered essential, important, or not important in order to be democratic. What seems to emerge is that Batswana attach almost equal importance to political and economic components, with economic factors having a slight edge. Within the political component, majority rule is deemed “essential” by 47 percent, regular elections (46 percent), multiparty competition (45 percent), and freedom of speech (41 percent) are also important. However, three of the economic components are seen as “essential” to democracy by slightly higher proportions than the political: basic necessities (52 percent), equality in education (51 percent), and jobs for everyone (49 percent). Just one third (34 percent) see a small income gap between the rich and the poor as an essential ingredient of democracy.

*Table 5: Understanding of Various Components of Democracy*

	Essential	Important
Majority rule	47.1%	40.2%
Complete freedom for anyone to criticise the government.	40.8%	43.8%
Regular elections	45.9%	36.7%
At least two political parties competing with each other.	44.6%	37.7%
Basic necessities like shelter, food, and water for everyone.	52.3%	38.8%
Jobs for everyone.	48.6%	37.2%
Equality in education	50.6%	37.8%
A small income gap between rich and poor.	33.7%	38.6%

*“People associate democracy with many diverse meanings such as the ones I will mention now. In order for a society to be called democratic, is each of these: “*

These results seem to demonstrate that as much as democracy is defined by political ideals, concrete economic circumstances have a direct bearing on it. From the survey we can see that Batswana are content because they have always enjoyed basic political rights. For example, Batswana’s emphasis on majority rule and freedom of speech is lower than in Zimbabwe and Malawi. The absolute economic hardships in Malawi and Zimbabwe also explain why they are considered essential parts of democracy in those countries (see Mattes, Bratton, Davids & Africa, 2000).

### ***Rejection of Non-Democratic Alternatives***

Another method to establish the level of popular commitment to democracy was to ask people a series of questions related to the procedural components of democracy. The responses reflect that democratic institutions are firmly entrenched in Botswana. The message is clear: under no circumstance will Batswana approve of authoritarian rule. Three quarters (76 percent) would disapprove of abandoning the system of regular multi-party elections rule for a one party regime, 74 percent would disapprove of decisions being made by chiefs or elders, 85 percent would disapprove of military rule, and 86 percent would oppose presidential dictatorship. 71 percent would disapprove (50 percent strongly so) of returning to live under the British Protectorate.

Asked whether they would approve of a situation where all decisions were made by technocrats (economic experts) rather than by government, 52 percent of the respondents said they would disapprove, and 28 percent approve. Indeed, development planning in Botswana is performed by technocrats: politicians only debate it in Parliament and usually approve it as proposed.

*Table 6: Rejection of Non-Democratic Alternatives*

	Strongly Disapprove / Disapprove	Neither Approve nor Disapprove	Strongly Approve/ Approve
If only one political party or candidates from only one party were allowed to stand for elections and hold office?	78%	2%	17%
If all decisions were made by a council of elders, traditional or chiefs.	74%	5%	18%
If the army came in to govern the country?	85%	1%	9%
If parliament and political parties were abolished, so that the President could decide everything?	86%	3%	7%
If all important decisions about the economy were made by economic experts rather than an elected government or parliament.	52%	11%	28%
If we returned to rule by the British	71%	4%	12%

*Our current system of governing with regular elections and more than one political party is not the only one \_\_\_\_\_ has ever had. Some people say that we would be better off if we had a different system of government. How much would you disapprove, neither disapprove nor approve, or approve of the following alternatives to our current system of government with at least two political parties and regular elections?*

### ***The Workings of Democracy in Botswana***

Majority pluralities of Botswana affirm that three decades of liberal democracy have brought about advances in political freedoms and economic rights compared to life before independence. With regard to political freedoms, six in ten (60 percent) say that there is more freedom for Botswana to join political organisations as well as to vote for the party of their choice than before independence. 57 percent say that there is now more freedom of expression than before independence. An equal 57 percent feel that Botswana are freer now from arbitrary arrest than under colonial rule. One half the public (49 percent) say that government treats people more equally than before the advent of democratic independence.

Concerning economic rights, 45 percent say they enjoy an improved adequate standard of living, 51 percent said there is increased access to basic necessities, and 43 percent said there is greater equality of opportunity exists in Botswana today than under colonial rule. Forty three percent say people are safer from crime and violence than before.

If these numbers appear lower than expected, it is not because significant proportions say these freedoms and rights were more secure under colonial rule: very few, in fact, say

this. But there are significant proportions (often between one-fifth and one-third) who say they do not know, concentrated among younger Batswana who simply cannot remember life before independence and therefore could not make a comparison.

*Table 7: Perceived increases in freedom and rights under multi-party politics*

	“Much Better” / “Better “
Anyone can freely say what he or she thinks	57%
People can join any political organisation	60%
People can live without fear of being arrested by the police if they have not done anything wrong	57%
Everybody is treated equally and fairly by government	60%
People are safe from crime and violence	49%
People have an adequate standard of living	43%
People have access to basic necessities ( like food and water)	45%
Regional, provincial official	51%
Batswana are equal to one another	43%

*Some people say that today, under our current system of government, our political and overall life is better than it was under the British. Others say things are no better, or even worse. For each of these following matters, would you say things today are worse, about the same, or better? (% “Much Better” / “Better”)*

While Batswana say democracy is the most preferable form of government under any circumstance, how much democracy do they think is delivered by their current political institutions? We assessed the extent to which people evaluate the content of their democracy by asking them whether their most recent elections (1999) were free and fair, as well as how democratic their political system is.

The 1999 elections were the first conducted under the auspices of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Even though there were some administrative problems in the administration of elections, they were certified free and fair by both national and international observer missions (DRP-UB, SADC). What do ordinary Batswana think? A clear majority, 55 percent, said the 1999 elections were “completely free and fair,” and another quarter (28 percent) said they were “free and fair, with some minor problems.”<sup>iii</sup> Only 7 percent did not have an opinion on the fairness of the elections.

*Table 8: How democratic was the last election?*

	Responses
Completely free and fair	55%
Free and fair, with some minor problems.	28%
On the whole, free and fair but with several major problems	7%
Not free and fair	3%
Don't know	7%

*On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in \_\_\_\_ ?  
Was it: \_\_\_\_?*

When asked to evaluate the overall democratic content of government, 46 percent of the respondents said the country is “completely democratic,” and a further 36 percent said it was “democratic, but with some minor exceptions.” A negligible 5 percent said Botswana is “not a democracy” and 4 percent were unable to offer an opinion on the matter.

*Table 9: How Democratic is the way your country is governed*

	Responses
Completely democratic	46%
Democratic, but with some minor exceptions.	36%
Democratic, with some major exceptions.	8%
Not a democracy	5%
Do not understand question (not read)	1%
Don't know (not read)	4%

*On the whole, is the way \_\_\_\_\_ is governed:*

Beyond whether people think Botswana’s political system produces democracy, how satisfied are they with the content of what is produced? Fully three quarters (75 percent) responded in the affirmative while 22 percent were not satisfied.

*Table 10: Satisfaction with Democracy*

	Responses
Very Satisfied / Fairly Satisfied	75%
Not Very Satisfied / Not At All Satisfied.	22%
Botswana Is Not A Democracy (Volunteered)	1%
Don't Know	3%

*Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Botswana?*

These results offer further support for the proposition that Botswana has been able to entrench a democratic culture. Its political system has used a consensual style of decision-making based in the Kgotla system (Lekorwe, 1989). And while Botswana adopted a Westminster parliamentary system at independence it retained the institution of chieftainship though in an advisory capacity. This successful blending of traditional and modern institutions meant that democracy was not an alien concept to Botswana. (Lekorwe, 1989).



## *State Legitimacy*

This section yields the following specific findings:

- The political system enjoys a very high level of legitimacy: 82 percent agree that the present government was elected through acceptable procedures; 73 percent believes that the government exercises power in an acceptable way; and 62 percent affirms that the Constitution expresses the broader values of the society.
- Batswana also express a great deal of trust in state institutions such as the army (71 percent), state broadcaster (71 percent), government press (67 percent), courts of law (64 percent), and the Electoral Commission (54 percent). However, they invest lower levels of trust in the direct political institutions of government: Parliament (46 percent), President (44 percent), and Local Government (41 percent).

One of the most significant tests of a democratic government is legitimacy. Governments ideally prefer to obtain compliance with its decisions through consent rather than through force. In order to keep a society content, there should exist a social contract between the governors and the governed based on trust and respect, not on fear and coercion.

Legitimacy is simply defined as “ a psychological relationship between the governed and their governors, which engenders a belief that the state’s leaders and institutions have a right to exercise political authority over the rest of the society” (Thomson, 2000:99). In other words, through legitimacy, citizens are convinced, rather than forced to obey the state.

According to Max Weber, there are three main ways in which government can obtain compliance from its citizens. The first way is through tradition where legitimacy rests on society’s culture and history. Citizens do not question the decisions of the ruler because of the belief that things are done according to God’s will. The second way is through charisma. Here citizens follow and obey because of the leaders’ personality. Finally, the third route is through legal-rational authority. This is provided by liberal democratic institutions where citizens obey the state because its institutions have been specifically designed to serve their interests. The government rules on behalf of citizens and formulates, executes and enforces laws designed to advance collective welfare.

Legitimacy therefore means that citizens accept that those in power have the right to make binding decisions in which all must abide by whether or not they agree with them. After all, the government has been duly elected to power by accepted procedures, it exercises power in an acceptable way, and the constitution of the country expresses the values and aspirations of citizens. Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with statements reflecting each of these conditions. A large majority, 82 percent believe that Botswana’s government was elected by acceptable procedures, and 73 percent agree that it exercises power in an acceptable way. Six in ten (62 percent) feel that the Constitution expresses the values and aspirations of Batswana. However, when asked whether the government has the right to make binding decisions that all people have to abide by whether or not they agree with them, 43 percent disagreed and only 37

percent agreed. This suggests that while Botswana’s government enjoys a measure of legitimacy, citizens are still hesitant to allow it to implement unpopular decisions. Batswana desire a government that is under check and accountable for its actions. This could also reflect a legacy of the country’s “winner take all” electoral system: those who support opposition parties short of political power may be especially unwilling to allow government to implement policies they oppose.

*Table 11: State Legitimacy*

	Strongly Agree / Agree
Our government was elected to power by accepted procedures.	82%
Our government exercised power in an acceptable way.	73%
Our constitution expresses the values and aspirations of Batswana people.	62%
Our government has the right to make decisions that all people have to abide by whether or not they agree with them.	37%

### ***Trust in Government and State Institutions***

Generally, a government, which is considered legitimate by the citizenry, is also one that is trusted. We asked respondents about the extent to which they trust government and state institutions to do what is right?

Trust in state institutions is quite high. An average of 64 percent of respondents say they can trust seven key state institutions. At the top of the ratings are army, information, and broadcasting (71 percent), followed by the government press (67 percent), courts of law (64 percent), independent press (62 percent), police (60 percent), and the Electoral Commission (54 percent). The high levels of trust invested in state *and* private media indirectly suggest that Batswana believe what they read, see, and hear.

Trust in more political government institutions is lower: Parliament (46 percent), President (44 percent), and Local Councils (41 percent). Trust ratings for traditional leaders was higher than that of the President (54 percent).

The higher levels of trust in state institutions reflects public confidence in their unambiguous decisions and ability to deliver, as opposed to the mudslinging of partisan institutions. The relatively low levels of trust in the President may also stem from the fact that he is not directly elected by the people of Botswana.

*Table 12: Trust In Institutions*

	Always/ Most of the Time
The President	44%
Parliament	46%
Your local government	41%
Chief	40%
The Army	71%
The police	60%
Courts of law	64%
Electoral Commission	54%
State Broadcasting Corporation	71%
Government Press/Newspapers	67%
Independent Press/Newspapers	62%

*How much of the time can you trust \_\_\_\_\_ to do what is right? Is it: always, most of the time, only some of the time, or never?*

### ***Perceived Institutional Corruption***

Corruption is an evil which hinders institutional capability and impedes social and economic development. In our survey questions, we defined corruption as a situation where those in government and the civil service take money or gifts from the people and use it for themselves, or expect people to pay them extra money or a gift to do their job. Respondents were then asked how many people they think are involved in corruption in different institutions: Government, Parliament, the Civil Service, and Local Government.

Although corruption cannot be said to be widespread in Botswana, government officials, legislators, and civil servants received significant levels of negative ratings when it came to corruption: 32 percent said “all” or “most” government officials are involved in corruption, 29 percent thought members of Parliament participate in corruption and 32 percent thought so about civil servants. Just 20 percent felt this way about officials in their local town governments. Although the figures are lower in Botswana than most other countries in this region, the Botswana government need not be complacent about the existence of the problem. To this end the government has already established the Directorate of Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC).

*Table 13: Perceptions of Government Corruption*

	All / Most
The Government	32%
Parliament	29%
Civil Servants	32%
Local Government	20%

*“What about corruption? (Corruption is where those in government and the civil service take money or gifts from the people and use it for themselves, or expect people to pay them extra money or a gift to do their job). How many officials in \_\_\_\_\_ do you think are involved in corruption? All of them, most of them, only some of them, or none?”*

### ***Personal Experience with Corruption***

Perceptions of corruption are not necessarily based on personal experience with corruption. Very few Batswana say they actually had to pay a bribe or do a favour for a government official in order to get a range of government services (to get a job, a government maintenance payment or loans, electricity or water, housing, or land). This is the lowest level of reported experience with corruption in Southern Africa (Mattes, Davids & Africa, 2000).

*Table 14: Personal experience with government corruption*

	Once or Twice / A Few times/ Often	Never
A job	1%	96%
A government maintenance payment, pension payment or loan	1%	97%
Electricity or water	<1%	97%
Housing or land	1%	97%

### ***Perceived Institutional Responsiveness***

Theorists from J. Stuart Mill to Robert Dahl have asserted that one of the key characteristics of democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of the citizens. Democracy affords citizens the right to petition their government with the hope of achieving better results. A good democratic government therefore does not only consider the demands of the citizens, but responds and acts upon those demands. In order to measure popular perceptions of government responsiveness, citizens were asked how interested they thought the President, Parliament, and Local Councils were in what happens to themselves or hearing what people like them think?

Over one half felt that Parliament (56 percent) and the President (53 percent) were interested in public opinion. Slightly under one half (47 percent) felt their local councils were responsive. At independence, Botswana preserved some traditional institutions such as chieftainship. Three quarters of Batswana (74 percent) affirmed that they have a traditional leader or headman. However, only 58 percent of these people (43 percent overall) felt their leader was interested in what they think.

*Table 15: Responsiveness of Institutions*

	Interested/ Very Interested	Not very Interested / Not at all Interested
President	53%	26%
Parliament	56%	26%
Local Council	47%	22%
Traditional Leader*	58%	18%

*How interested do you think the \_\_\_\_\_ is in what happens to you or hearing what people like you think?*

*\* Among those who say they have a traditional leader.*

## ***Government Performance***

In this section the following main findings stand out:

- In the eyes of ordinary Batswana, the three most important problems facing the country are job creation (58 percent), HIV/AIDS (24 percent), and education (20 percent).
- Botswana is the only country in the region where the government receives a positive rating across most issues. Majorities approve of government performance in education (71 percent approval), health care (69 percent), basic service delivery (69 percent), fighting crime (64 percent), managing the economy (60 percent), land affairs (57 percent), and creating jobs (52 percent). Four in ten approve of government performance in terms of building houses (44 percent) and controlling inflation (41 percent).
- 57 percent approved of President Mogae's job performance over the previous year; 64 approved of Parliament's job performance, and 54 percent approved of the performance of their local government.

### ***Patience with Government Performance***

To what extent do citizens excuse the performance of the government because of the problems inherited from colonialism? Overall, 60 percent of Batswana felt that their system of government ought to be able to deal with the country's problems regardless of who caused them. Only 15 percent said that it would take years for the government to deal with problems inherited from British colonial rule. These results indicate that Botswana may run out of patience if the government does not address their problems immediately.

### ***Most important Problems to be addressed by Government***

The survey asked people to identify the most important problems that government should address (they were able to name up to three problems). The most frequently cited problems were job creation and HIV/AIDS. This is not surprising as the country is facing high levels of unemployment, compounded by recent closures of many factories such as the Hyundai plant. The termination of Tirelo Sechaba has also hit recent high school graduates, the majority of whom are now roaming the streets looking for jobs. This was evidenced by a throng of more than seven thousand young people who turned up at a Botswana Defense Force (BDF) camp in response to advertisements designed to recruit no more than four hundred new troops. Interestingly, job creation, AIDS, and poverty tend to be more pronounced in the rural areas. Both poverty and unemployment were seen as pressing problems by those below high school education at 79 percent and 75 percent respectively. This confirms what is already known about the problem of poverty and unemployment in Botswana.

*Table 16:: Most Important Problems Facing Botswana That Require Government Action*

	First Response	Second Response	Third Response
Job creation	37%	15%	6%
HIV / AIDS	12%	9%	4%
Poverty / Destitution	8%	7%	3%
Farming	8%	4%	2%
Education	5%	9%	5%

### ***Government Performance on Specific Issues***

The survey asked Batswana to evaluate government performance in a range of areas. The highest level of positive evaluations were given to government performance in education (71 percent saying it was doing “well” or “very well”), followed by government delivery of basic services such as water and electricity (70 percent); health (69 percent), crime reduction (63 percent), ensuring that everyone has enough land (60 percent), and managing the economy (60 percent). Just over half (52 percent) gave positive evaluations to government efforts to create jobs. Less than half approved of government programs to build houses (44 percent), and keep prices stable (41 percent).

*Table 17: Government Performance on Specific Issues (percentage of reponses)*

	Very well	Fairly well	Not very well	Not at all well
Creating jobs	6.4	45.2	30.7	15.3
Building houses	6.4	37.3	30.2	16.8
Ensuring that prices remain stable	7.0	34.0	28.1	18.8
Reducing crime	14.8	48.3	22.3	12.1
Improving health services	18.5	50.9	20.0	8.6
Addressing the education needs of all people in Botswana.	19.3	51.6	19.0	6.8
Managing the economy	13.9	46.5	19.0	9.0
Delivering the basic services like water and electricity.	19.6	49.8	18.9	8.8
Making sure everyone has enough land	12.5	44.6	22.3	15.1

Overall it seems Batswana are relatively content with what the government is doing in a variety of spheres with the exception of two areas; housing (particularly in urban areas) and fighting inflation. This satisfaction is largely due to the good performance of the economy, seemingly transparent government operations, and good leadership.

### ***General Job Approval***

A solid majority (64 percent) approved of the performance of Parliament over the previous year and over half (54 percent) provided positive evaluations to their local governments. Consistent with the high levels of trust in the President, 57 percent were satisfied with his job performance.

### *Comparison of the Government Today to the Non-Democratic Past*

Another way to measuring government performance is to compare it with the previous one. Respondents were asked specific questions about the effectiveness of the present government in comparison with the colonial government. Just under half (45 percent) said that the recent government is more effective than that under the colonial regime, 43 percent said it is more responsive to public opinion, 30 percent said it is more trustworthy, and 22 percent said it is less corrupt. The ratings are generally lower than we might expect most probably because it was difficult for most respondents to recall the performance of the colonial government, now thirty years in the past.

*Table 18: Comparison of Present Government to Colonial Rule*

	More / Much more	Same	Less / Much Less
Effective in the way it performs its jobs	45%	9%	11%
Interested in hearing what people like you think.	43%	11%	11%
Corrupt	22%	13%	22%
Trustworthy	30%	14%	18%

*You have told us how you feel about the effectiveness of the way government performs its job, its interest in what you think, corruption, and your trust in government. But how does this compare to the government that this country had under British colonialism. Is government today more, about the same, or less \_\_\_\_ as under British colonialism?*

## *Economic Performance*

This section yields the following findings:

- Botswana (53 percent) tend to feel they are economically worse off than their fellow citizens.
- As of late 1999, a plurality (37 percent) felt that national economic conditions had remained constant over the previous year. Just less than one third (30 percent) say things had become worse and a quarter (26 percent) felt they had become better.
- One half felt that the economy would get worse (25 percent) or stay the same (26 percent) in the forthcoming twelve months. Just under one-third (31 percent) expected the economy to improve.

It is widely accepted that democracies that perform well economically are likely to endure. Przewoski and his colleagues (1996) have demonstrated that the level of economic development shapes the survival prospects of a democracy. If economic growth is sustained and evenly distributed over a long period, it will affect changes which will be conducive to the consolidation of democracy. Botswana has fared very well economically even with acute income disparities and a sizeable proportion of the population living below poverty line. Nonetheless, Botswana still exhibit strong support for the democratic system.

### *Perceptions of National Economic Conditions*

As of late 1999, a majority (55 percent) of Botswana were dissatisfied with national economic conditions. These findings are not surprising with unemployment at 22 percent (CSO Labour Force Survey, 1995/96) and other surveys showing a high proportion of Botswana living below the poverty line.

Comparing present economic conditions to a year ago, 37 percent felt that economic conditions had stayed about the same, while 30 percent felt that economic conditions had worsened. One quarter (26 percent) felt that the conditions had improved.

*Table 19: Comparison of Present Economics Conditions With a Year Ago*

	Responses
Better / Much Better	26%
About the Same	37%
Worse / Much Worse	30%

*How do economic conditions in Botswana now compare to one year ago?*

In terms of economic prospects, 26 percent felt economic conditions would remain the same and another 25 percent expected things to become worse. One third (31 percent) expected things would improve.



*Table 20: Economic Expectations in Twelve Months Time*

	Responses
Better / Much Better	31%
About the Same	26%
Worse / Much Worse	25%

*What about in twelve months time? Do you expect economic conditions in Botswana to be worse, the same, or better than they are now?*

### ***Economic Comparisons***

In a country with the highest income disparity, a major question is whether people feel that they are doing as well (or as badly) as the next person. It is perhaps not surprising that Batswana tend to feel that they are worse off than the majority of their fellow citizens. Only 41 percent felt that their personal economic conditions were better compared to other people of Botswana. The majority (53 percent) felt that their economic conditions were worse than other Batswana, while 25 percent felt their conditions were about the same.

*Table 21: Comparison of Personal Economic Conditions With Others*

	Responses
Better / Much Better	19%
About the Same	25%
Worse / Much Worse	53%

*Now let us speak about your personal economic conditions. Would you say they are worse, the same, or better than other Batswana?*

Sixty one percent of respondents felt that the economic conditions of the social group with which they identify are about the same as other groups. This is consistent with 84 percent of the respondents who think that the government represents the interests of all citizens of Botswana, rather than one particular group.

## *Citizenship*

In this section the following findings stand out:

- 45 percent of Batswana say they never talk about politics.
- A majority of Batswana (57 percent) say they feel they do not have enough information about politics.
- A large majority (71 percent) say the way they vote can make things better.
- Batswana are generally law-abiding citizens.
- Nine in ten say they would oppose government attempts to shut down critical news media or ban political parties.

### *Knowledge of Political Leaders*

One of the defining characteristics of democracy is popular participation in the political system. Meaningful citizen participation requires that citizens should be informed and aware of the nature and character of the political system of which they are a part. In order to test people's awareness of the political system, we asked them to tell us the names of the Vice-President, Minister of Finance, member of Parliament and local Councillor.

Most Batswana were able to name their elected political leaders: 82 percent were able to correctly identify the Vice-President, 72 percent could name their member of Parliament, and 52 percent their local Councillor. However, only 13 percent could name the Minister of Finance.

*Table 22: Political Knowledge*

	Responses
Vice President	83%
The Minister of Finance	14%
Member of parliament for this constituency	73%
Your local councillor	53%

*First of all, can you tell me who presently holds the following offices?*

This level of political knowledge of elected leaders is encouraging; we believe it is comparable to what would be found in more established democracies. Several explanations may be advanced. First, the survey was conducted immediately following the general elections. Thus, the Minister of Finance is not a politician and was specially nominated by Parliament and appointed by the President. He was before then unknown in politics as the governor of the Bank of Botswana.

One startling finding is that only about half were able to identify correctly their local Councillor. One would have thought that the local councillor would attract more recognition as a community leader because he/she resides with the electorate and therefore is much closer to them than the Member of Parliament. A plausible explanation

is that at the time of elections, national level politicians dominate the political scene from the campaign trail.

### ***Mass Media***

The mass media plays an important part in informing people about their leaders as well as the broader political system. To what extent do Batswana have access to and use various parts of the mass media to receive news?

A majority of Batswana (57 percent) listen to radio news on a daily basis. Another thirty five percent say they receive news from the radio at lesser frequencies (e.g. a few times a week, a few times a month, less than once a month). Only eight percent say they never receive news from radio.

Viewership of television news is much lower. Less than one in five (17 percent) view television news on a daily basis. Just over half (51 percent) say they never see news broadcasts on television.

Newspaper news actually reaches a slightly higher audience in Botswana than television. One in five (21 percent) say they read a newspaper on a daily basis. Another 41 percent say they use newspaper at lower frequencies. One third (32 percent) said they never get news from the newspapers.

*Table 23: Media Use*

	Everyday/ A few times a week	Never
Radio	81%	8%
Television	29%	51%
Newspapers	48%	32%

*How often do you get news from the following sources?*

The high level of reliance on radio for news underwrites government control of dissemination of information. Government is able to use the radio to report on its activities as well as to shape people’s vision and expectations for their lives. This may be one factor behind popular support for its activities. Government media is not as critical as the private media as they often report on the news they are given rather than searching for news.

### ***Interest in Politics***

To what extent are Batswana interested in politics or discuss political matters? Just over half (51 percent) said they discussed and shared ideas with friends on issues pertaining to politics, either frequently or occasionally. Yet, 45 percent never do so.

*Table 24: Discuss Politics*

	Responses
Frequently	14.2%
Occasionally	37.0%
Never	45.1%

*When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters ..... ?*

Less than one fifth (15 percent) said they “always” followed political affairs and just over a fifth (23 percent) said “some of the time.” Another fifth (21 percent) say they follow politics “only now and then” and fully 38 percent say “hardly at all.”

*Table 25: Follow Politics*

	Responses
Always, Most of the time	14.7%
Some of the time	22.8%
Only now and then	20.8%
Hardly at all	37.8%

*Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs: \_\_\_\_\_?*

### ***Political Competence and Efficacy***

The survey asked respondents to comment on several different aspects of their sense of political competence and efficacy.

Just over one third of Batswana (38 percent) agree with a statement that they feel they have little or no control over their lives. Most people (53 percent) disagree.

*Table 26: Control Over life*

	Agree/strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree
You feel you have little or no control over what happens to your life	37.9%	7.5%	52.8%

When we turn to people’s sense of control over the larger political system we find different results. Well over half (57 percent) agree that they have insufficient information about political life and government action. Two thirds (66 percent) agree that sometimes political and governmental affairs are complicated and too difficult for one to understand. This is a follow up to what the study demonstrates as a lack of discussion with others on political matters. This 57 percent is more than half the people surveyed. Therefore it is indicative from the study that generally people are ignorant about political life, government and public affairs.

*Table 27: Political Competence*

	Agree / Strongly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
You think that you do not have enough information about political life and the actions of government	57%	8%	33%
Sometimes political and government affairs seem so complicated that you can't really understand what's going on.	66%	8%	23%

Batswana do however retain a general sense of optimism about the degree to which voting and elections allow them to have an impact on the political system. Two thirds (67 percent) felt that the way they voted can have a positive impact on the country while one quarter (28 percent) felt that their vote could not make things any better.

Another two thirds (66 percent) agreed that the question of who holds political power matters and one quarter (27 percent) said that things go on much the same regardless of who is in power.

*Table 28: Efficacy of Voting*

	Agree / Agree Strongly
The way you vote could make things better in the future.	67%
No matter how you vote, it won't make things any better in the future.	28%

*Table 29: Efficacy of Elections*

	Agree / Agree strongly
It is important who is in power because it can make a difference to what happens.	66%
It doesn't really matter who is in power, because in the end things go on much the same.	27%

### ***Participation in Civic Organisations***

Democratic consolidation is also measured by the existence of a vibrant civil society. A weak civil society has been a predominant characteristic of Botswana's political system. This has meant that there have been few institutions able to countervail the state.

The infancy of Botswana's civil society is reflected by the fact that ordinary people have not yet realised their strength of numbers and that if they act together they can win more

concessions from the state. Based on the survey results it appears that people are not willing to gather with others and air their views on matters affecting the community.

Just under half (46 percent) said they had attended a church group meeting in the previous twelve months. Over half (54 percent) had never attended any church group meeting.

Three quarters (75 percent) had not attended any meetings of local self-help groups. Just under three quarters (70 percent) had not attended any meeting of local groups concerned with community matters. And four fifths (81 percent) had not attended any meetings of local commercial or agricultural groups.

*Table 30: Frequency of Organisational Civic Participation (percentage of respondents)*

	Often/ A Few Times	Once or twice	Never
Church Group (other than religious services)	34	11	54
Local self-help association	16	8	75
Group concerned with local matters such as schools, housing or rates	19	10	70
Local commercial organisation such as a business group or farmers' association	11	6	81
Group that does things for the community	13	9	76
A trade union	11	4	82

*Over the past year, how often have you attended meetings of a \_\_\_\_\_?*

### *Interpersonal Trust*

A vibrant civil society is also dependent on interpersonal trust that can allow people to cooperate and work together to promote causes. However, the study shows that Batswana do not trust each other: only 14 percent said that most people could be trusted. These low levels of interpersonal trust may be an important factor behind the lack of civic involvement.

*Table 31: Interpersonal Trust*

	Responses
Most people can be trusted.	14%
Can't be too careful.	81%
Don't know	5%

*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?*

### *Political Participation*

To what extent do Batswana contact political party or government officials for assistance with important problems. Nine in ten people (90 percent) said they have not made any contact with such official in the previous twelve months. Just one in twenty (5 percent) had contacted a local councillor and an even smaller 2 percent had made contact with a Member of Parliament.

*Table 32: Types of Officials Contacted*

	Response
Elected local councillor	5%
Elected regional or provincial representative	<1%
Elected member of parliament	2%
Local council meeting or hearing	1%
Regional, Provincial Legislative meeting or hearing.	<1%
National parliament meeting or hearing	0%
National government meeting or hearing.	<1%
Local council official	<1%
Regional, provincial official	<1%
National government official, civil servant	<1%
Political party official	<1%

Voting is an important aspect of political participation. When asked whether they voted in the 1999 elections, 54 percent said they voted, while 24 percent were unable to vote, and 17 percent decided not to vote. The Independent Electoral Commission reports 77 percent of those registered to vote as having voted in the 1999 general elections.

*Table 33: Self-Reported Voting Participation in 1999 Election*

	Response %
I voted	55
I was unable to vote	24
I decided not to vote	17
Other	5

*With regard to the most recent, 1999 national elections, which statement is true for you?*

We also asked respondents whether they explored other avenues of participating in the political system. One quarter (27 percent) said they had participated with others to address an important problem affecting the community or nation at least once. Almost half (44 percent) said they would do it if they had the chance. Just over a quarter (27 percent) said they “would never” do this.

Four in ten (39 percent) reported having attended an election rally at least once. Just under one third (30 percent) said they would attend if they had the chance. Just under one third (30 percent) said they would never attend a rally.

Only 10 percent have worked for a political candidate or party. Just over a third (37 percent) said they would work if they had a chance. But a majority (51 percent) said they would never work for any political candidate.

Very few Batswana (6 percent) have ever expressed their opinion by writing a letter to a newspaper, though almost half (48 percent) would do if they had a chance. Four in ten (43 percent) said they would never this.

*Table 34: Non-Voting Political Participation*

	Have done	Would do it if had the chance	Would never do it
Attend an election rally	40%	30%	27%
Work for a political candidate or party.	10%	37%	51%
Participate with others to address an important problem affecting the community or nation ( other than election)	27%	44%	27%
Write a letter to a newspaper	6%	48%	43%

*Compliance with Duties of Citizenship*

Botswana citizens are reputed to exhibit very high levels of compliance and peacefulness. When asked if they would ever avoid obligations, 84 percent alleged that they would 'never' claim government benefits to which they were not entitled to, even if there were ample opportunities to do that. More than three-quarters (84 percent) said they would not avoid paying development levy and property taxes. The same proportion said they would never avoid income taxes, and a slightly lower proportion declared they would never obtain and enjoy services without paying for them.

*Table 35: Non-Compliance*

	Have done	Would do it if had the chance	Would never do it
Claim government benefits to which you are not entitled (like a pension, maintenance, or unemployment payment)	1%	8%	84%
Avoid paying Development levy or property taxes.	1%	7%	84%
Avoid paying income taxes.	1%	7%	84%
Get services like electricity or water without paying for them.	1%	7%	83%

*Protest*

To what extent are Batswana willing to register their displeasure if the government did something they felt was wrong or harmful. When asked about actions they would take if the government did something they thought was wrong or harmful, 62 percent said they would never take part in a protest march. Just over one quarter (27 percent) say they would protest if they had the chance. Three quarters (72 percent) would never join in a boycott of rates, services, or taxes. One fifth (22 percent) say they would. Between eight and nine in ten say they would never stage a sit-in or disrupt government meetings.



*Table 36: Political Protest*

	Have done	Would do it if had the chance	Would never do it
Attend a demonstration or protest march.	10%	27%	62%
Participate in a boycott of rates, services or taxes.	3%	22%	72%
Take part in a sit-in, disruption of government meeting or offices.	1%	12%	84%
Use force or violent methods (such as damaging public property)	<1%	7%	91%

*Popular Responses to Threats to Democracy*

Opinion was significantly varied with regard to potential government actions against democracy. For example, what would people do if the government decided to suspend parliament and cancel forthcoming elections. An overwhelming majority of Batswana (85 percent) would oppose such a move, yet one fifth (22 percent) say they would not do anything about it. However, one fifth (21 percent) would embark or join a march or demonstration, 15 percent would contact a government official about the matter, 7 percent would write to a newspaper, and 3 percent would phone radio or television in order to voice their grievances. One quarter of respondents (26 percent) said they would speak about it with others. This pattern is relatively the same with regard to the other hypothetical situations we presented to respondents, listed below.

*Table 37: Defending Democracy*

	Oppose/ Strongly Oppose	Neither Support nor Oppose	Support/ Strongly Support
Shut down newspapers, or radio or television station that were critical of it	90%	4%	3%
Dismissed judges who ruled against the government	85%	5%	6%
Banned political parties	88%	6%	2%
Suspended the parliament and cancelled the next elections	91%	3%	3%

Although Batswana do not participate actively in civic matters, they are more likely to take action if democracy is threatened. They are generally peace loving people who would prefer talking through their differences rather than resorting to violence. One possible reason behind Batswana’s relatively low levels of participation is that satisfaction tends to breed a sense of complacency. Unlike other countries in the region which have experienced extreme deprivation at the hands of minority rule (like Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia) or one party regimes (like Zambia and Malawi), Botswana has remained unique. As a result Batswana are not as politically mobilised as those in other countries.

## *Conclusion*

Botswana is the longest serving multi-party democracy in the region. The resilience of democracy in Botswana is anchored on the careful blending of Westminster parliamentary institutions and the traditional practices of the Kgotla system. The support for democracy and the public perceptions of democracy by the populace indeed suggests that democracy is the only game in town. This is supported by empirical evidence that shows an overwhelming majority (82 percent) of respondents who feel that democracy is the most preferable system of government.

Although people trust the army, 85 percent would oppose it governing the country, 86 percent would object the abolition of parliament and political parties to allow the President to decide everything, 76 percent of the respondents said they would disapprove of a one party regime, and 71 percent said they would disapprove of reverting back to the old system of colonial rule.

Botswana attach almost equal importance to political and economic components of democracy. Thus democracy finds expression in social reality, in both political freedoms but also the delivery of goods and services.

The new political institutions that exist in Botswana enjoy a considerable measure of political legitimacy. While civil society is still weak, people participate and support government structures, and are aware of their civic duties and limits. In no small measure the government of Botswana enjoys wide acceptance and legitimacy: 82 percent believe that the government of the day was elected by acceptable procedures, and 73 percent feel the government is exercising its authority in an acceptable way. Complementing this legitimacy are high levels of trust in key institutions of government from over half the respondents.

It appears that Botswana has fostered a sense of national identity where loyalty extends to the nation-state rather than narrow ethnic interests. In addition, Botswana do not feel that they are discriminated against simply because they belong to a particular ethnic group.

While Botswana are satisfied with the political and economic performance of government, there are areas which need serious attention. Income inequalities affecting especially the rural poor are still a major problem. In the urban areas, the delivery of housing, unemployment, and a high cost of living create disadvantages for many people. Nevertheless, people support the government and hope that the situation will improve.

## *Appendix A Sampling and Fieldwork*

The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire containing approximately 120 items, including both open and closed ended questions, in six broad conceptual areas: democracy, governance, economy, means of survival, formal and informal networks, and political behaviours.

A total of 1200 persons were interviewed. A random probability sample of this size allows a confidence interval of plus or minus 3 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. In other words, we are sure that, 19 times out of 20, results based on the total sample differs by no more than 3 percentage points in either direction from the results that would have been obtained had we interviewed every adult Batswana.

The survey was conducted in the nine administrative districts of Botswana, with the number of interviews in each district being proportional to the district's population size. Six fieldwork teams, composed of one supervisor and four fieldworkers, were trained in a one-day intensive workshop at the University of Botswana.

### *The Social Characteristics of the Sample*

The survey was divided evenly between males and females. In order to assess the representativeness of the sample, we compare population estimates of three basic characteristics based on the sample with figures based on the 1993/1994 Household Income and Employment Survey.

*Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the sample*

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>Survey Results</b>	<b>1993/94 HIES</b>
Male	49%	47%
Female	51%	53%
Below High School	76%	79%
Above High School	23%	21%
Rural	66%	77%
Urban	34%	23%
Median Age	32 years (of those 18 years and above)	17 years (of all ages)

*Source: Household Income and Expenditure Survey – HIES 1993/94.*

The Botswana research team would like to thank the following post graduate students who assisted in collecting this data:

P. Moamogwe, G. Kesianye, B. Thamuku, R. Benjamin, O. Lesobea, V. Noah, S. Modiko, D. Jenamiso, E. Majako, J. Molefe, J. Motlhanka, G. Leshetla, T. Mari, N. Siwela, M. Phia, B. Pheto, G. Masimega, B. Modumedisi, L. Mosugelo, M. Magwadi, T. Ketshabile, L. Makwati, S. Sehularo, and L. Goitsemodimo.

## *Selected References*

*Botswana Gazette* 1999.

Bratton, M. and Mattes, R. (1999) "Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?" *Afrobarometer Series Working Papers* ([www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)).

Central Statistical Office (1995) *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 1993/94*. Gaborone: Central Statistics Office.

Central Statistical Office (1997) *Labour Force Survey 1995-96*. Gaborone: Central Statistics Office.

Diamond, L (1999) *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Du Toit, P (1995) *State Building and Democracy in Southern Africa: Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa*. Washington DC : United States Institute of Peace. Washington.

Folz, D (1996) *Survey Research for Public Administration*. London: Sage Publication.

Held, D (1987) *Models of Democracy*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Holm, J (1988) "Botswana: A Paternalistic Democracy" in Diamond, L et al, eds. *Democracy in Developing Countries*, Vol. 2. Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Lekorwe, M (1989) "The Kgotla and the Freedom Square-One or Two Way Communication?" Unpublished Manuscript.

Lesetedi, G (1999) "HIV/AIDS and the Status of Women in Botswana," in Kempe Hope Sr., eds., *Aids And Development in Africa: A Social Science Perspective* London, The Haworth Press.

Mattes, R, M. Bratton, YD Davids & C Africa (2000) "Public Opinion and the Consolidation of Democracy In Southern Africa" *Afrobarometer Series Working Papers* ([www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)).

Molutsi, P & Holm, J (1990) "Developing Democracy When Civil Society Is Weak: The Case of Botswana". *African Affairs*. Vol 89, No. 356.

Przeworski, A (1996) "What Makes Democracies Endure?" *Journal of Democracy*, 7/1: 39-55.

Thomson, A (2000) *An Introduction to Politics*. London: Routledge.

Somolekae, G (1999) *An Evaluation of the Performance of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in Botswana's 1999 Elections*. Gaborone: University of Botswana Democracy Research Project.

Schedler, A (1998) "How Should We Study Democratic Consolidation?" *Democratization* Vol. 5:4.

Stedman, S. ed, *Botswana: Political Economy of Democratic Development*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Press, 1993.

Schlemmer, L. et. al. *Present Realities and Strategies for the Future: Training Workshop for the Botswana Democratic Party*, Gaborone, 1997.

Wiseman, J. 'Botswana: The Achievements of Seretse Khama,' *The Round Table*, No. 280 (October 1980).

## Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> The survey was supported by a grant from Southern African Democracy Fund of the United States Agency for International Development, Regional Centre for Southern Africa to the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA). IDASA coordinated a seven country cross national survey called the Southern African Democracy Barometer in 1999-2000, of which the SARDF USAID/RCSA grant supported surveys in six countries. The Southern African Democracy Barometer has since joined forces with similar survey projects in West and East Africa and is now known as the Afrobarometer.

<sup>ii</sup> An exit poll conducted by the Democracy Research Project (DRP) of the University of Botswana reported an overwhelming majority of 92 percent who said the elections were free and fair.