DOMINANT PARTIES: THE CASE OF THE BOTSWANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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Introduction

This paper forms part of a larger study on dominant parties in the Southern African region. It focuses on the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). That the BDP is a dominant political party in Botswana is not a matter open to serious doubt. Since the country’s attainment of nationhood in 1966, the party has won all the nine general elections. Its successive electoral victories and the marginalization of many of the opposition parties has given rise to the view that whilst Botswana operates in a multiparty framework, it is in essence a de facto one party dominant system (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2006:486). As Pempel (1990:1) explains, under this system ‘despite free electoral competition, relatively open information systems, respect for civil liberties, and the right of free political association, a single party has managed to govern alone…without interruption, for substantial periods of time’ (quoted in Thackrah 2000:1).

Whilst circumstances under which parties become dominant may differ across countries, certain generalisations not specifically limited to those enumerated by Thackrah (2000) can be made. We argue that factors that explain BDP’s dominance include the absence of a (violent) liberation war, the emergence of moderate charismatic leaders who skilfully downplayed nationalist sentiments at the time of independence.

Nonetheless, country specific circumstances and experiences have a significant bearing on whether a party becomes dominant or not. Prah (2002:2) argues that in many African countries, the only elections that have been without any taint of vote rigging or unfair electoral practices have been those that ushered in the first post-independence governments, and that others have been manipulated to produce results favourable to incumbent regimes. In contrast, a few countries such as Botswana and Mauritius have long embraced competitive elections as a means of establishing political legitimacy.

There is an acknowledgment in the literature that the notion of one party dominance has been applied is different settings and was commonly regarded as something that should not happen (Thackrah, 2000). Yet dominance is a normal trend observable in authoritarian as well as completely free democracies (Thackrah, 2000). There is no doubt that the BDP is a dominant party. It fits Duverger’s analysis of
domination, ‘which slows down the swing of the pendulum under [alternation], granting one party continuous pre-eminence under [stable distribution] and moderates the swing of a party system towards the left under [Leftism]’ (Duverger, 1959:312). Stable distribution of power characterises party dominance in Botswana, which experienced neither alternation nor Leftism.

The other issue is whether factionalism would lead to the collapse of the BDP. Duverger had claimed that dominance breeds its own death. ‘Domination takes the zest from political life, simultaneously bringing stability. The dominant party wears itself out in office, it loses its vigour, and its arteries harden. It would be possible to show that every domination bears within itself the seeds of its own destruction’ (Duverger, 1959: 312). There is no doubt that factionalism has the potential to destroy a party. It could break the party if feuding reaches an intolerable level. However, in Botswana, there is no empirical evidence that feuding is reaching that level and that the party is losing its vigour and responsiveness. Instead, factionalism has brought some uncertain institutionalised pluralism that assisted the party to sustain internal party debate, to reform government policy and to institutionalise the competition for party positions (except the presidency and vice presidency). On the other hand, while it is true that the popular vote of the party has been sliding down, it has continued to win high percentages of seats partly due to the first past the post electoral system in place. There doesn’t seem like the electoral system will be changed soon, and BDP is most likely to continue winning.

The literature continues to make a distinction between moderate pluralism/consociational democracy that generates political stability and centrifugal pluralism that are ‘commonly unable to cope with extensive exogenous loads and either collapse or transform themselves into more stable systems before the breaking point is reached’ (Thackrah, 2000: 3). It is true that BDP factional politics has not reached a breaking point because important compromises were reached within the party, compelling the factions to accept constitutional reforms such as the one that brought automatic succession, to sometimes cooperate in sharing party positions, and to regularly meet to discuss and chart the way forward.
Other authors argue that cohesion within a dominant party lasts as long as the party is in power and ends when the party loses power, such as UNIP in Zambia. ‘Cohesion in a dominant party emerges from the mutual desire to share the fruits of power, a desire sufficiently strong to hold extreme demands in check and moderate potentially disintegrative tendencies’ (Arian and Barnes, 1974: 602). Other authors extend the argument to say that ‘a logical extension of this point is that if a dominant party actually loses office, it is unlikely to continue to exist if its main source of support was incumbency itself’ (Lusztig, James and Moon, 1997: 66). This suggests that the BDP would cease to exist the moment it loses state power. This thesis is difficult to prove because the BDP has not yet lost power. But we argue that the BDP is an institutionalised party that has changed leadership three times without collapsing. There is no empirical evidence that it would collapse once it loses power.

**Explaining the Botswana Democratic Party’s Dominance**

The development of one-party dominance is often assumed to be linked to the historical background of the formation of the parties in varying countries (Doorenpleet, 1999). According to Thackrah (2000:4), a party may acquire its legitimacy and by implication its dominant status because of the role it has played in the period of turmoil or transition. In contrast, the BDP did not emerge as a result of turmoil or nationalistic movement. Rather it was set up to counter the more radical parties of the time such as the Botswana Peoples Party (BPP). The position of the BDP was a popular one because it was supported by history in the sense that Botswana had not gone through a violent revolution which necessitated radical politics, and the general population was in good terms with Europeans of whom the British had established a protectorate over Bechuanaland and had shielded the people from annexation by the Boers in South Africa, the British South Africa Company in Rhodesia and the Germans in South West Africa (Maundeni, 2000). The fact that the president of the BDP, had married a white British women, was the clearest expression of the intimacy between the two people, and this contributed to the popularity of the party.

In line with Pempel’s (1990) argument that a dominant party has to initiate a historic project that determines the national policy agenda and lays the roots for long
lasting support base, the BDP’s leadership prioritised development. Botswana’s economic prosperity has been a crucial ingredient in the BDP’s success especially in light of the following: at independence in 1966, the country was one of the poorest in the world with virtually no economic, social and even institutional infrastructure (Harvey and Lewis 1990:15; Maundeni, 2000). Its per capita income was no more than BWP60, an equivalent of US$12 today. There was no private sector to drive the economy and the burden of stimulating the economy was entirely shouldered by the BDP government. Henderson (1990:43) describes the country then as: ‘A ramshackle collection of different districts loosely held together…by an under-financed administration and united economically by little more than poverty and drought’. Following the discovery and centralisation of all mining of diamonds in the 1970s, the country’s economy took off, with relatively equitable distribution of resources.

The 1980s represented a period of unprecedented economic growth and economic benefits for the rest of the country. With an average growth rate of 12 percent per annum the country’s economy was one of the fastest growing in the world in that decade (Matsheka and Botlhomilwe 2000:38). Through the prudent management of the economy by the BDP government, the country was able to overcome some of the difficulties it faced at independence to become one of the richest non-oil producing country in Africa (Republic of Botswana 2004). Significantly, it has been classified by the World Bank as an Upper Middle Income country with a per capita GDP of more than US$ 3800. Foreign reserves currently stand at US$6.2 billion (equivalent to about BWP34.7 billion Pula) (Botswana Budget Speech 2006).

Although school fees have recently (2006) been introduced, Botswana’s economic prosperity saw the introduction in 1988 of free schooling from primary education right up to tertiary education. It has also allowed for almost free access to public health services, clean water supply and massive expansion of the physical infrastructure. With an adult HIV prevalence of over 20 percent (Negin 2005:268), this prosperity has also allowed the country to provide free antiretroviral (ARV) aids drugs to aids patients. By the end of 2005, there were at least 58 822 people on the ARV program (NACA 2006:20). This is in sharp contrast to the position in South Africa were the government has been slow in rolling out the aids drug. In fact there appears to be some reluctance on the part of
government to distribute the drug. For instance, the South African Health Minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang who has been dismissive of the link between HIV and AIDS is on record for prescribing garlic and lemon for the disease: ‘I think garlic is absolutely critical. Lemon is absolutely critical to boost the immune system. Olive oil is absolutely critical…just one teaspoon, it will last the whole month’ (Choritz 2004).

However, it should also be acknowledged that the BDP government had developed intimacy with the bureaucracy, ensuring that its policies were passionately implemented. Scholars acknowledge that economic success was tied to the existence of friendly political-bureaucratic relationships (Good, 1994; Leftwich, 1995; Maundeni, 2000). This intimate relationship has been able to produce relative strong state system in which relative autonomy and competency have been nurtured and sustained. And this has allowed the ruling BDP to insulate the bureaucracy from numerous political demands.

The BDP had also been able to attract to its side larger ethno-linguistic groups especially groups such as Bangwato, Bakgatla and Bakwena, Bakalanga and others. In addition, it had intimacy with women groups, the business community and the rural people. Thus, the BDP was popular among most of the large ethnic groups, women, business, and the rural areas where the party associated itself with individuals who were associated with chieftainship or those who were cattle aristocrats and peasants. The BDP therefore skilfully mobilised these leading social forces and distributed more resources to them in the government-sponsored development programmes. In contrast, many opposition parties in Botswana were formed on and or campaigned along tribal lines hence some of them became regional. As Selolwane (2002) argues the Botswana National Front (BNF) sought to exploit electoral gain by using the issue of ethnic discrimination. The BNF in its calculations (or miscalculations) thought they could mobilise support by highlighting the injustices of Botswana’s tribally biased constitution (Selolwane, 2002). And of course this strategy did not bear fruit. The BDP government managed to share resources irrespective of ethnic orientation. Thus, the BDP has tended to outweigh the indignity of cultural subjugation (ibid, 2002).

Agricultural policies such as Accelerated Rural Development Programme (ARDP), Arable Lands Development Policy (ALDEP), and Accelerated Rain-fed Agricultural Programme (ARAP) were incentives given to the rural producers. Picard
noted that the ARDP was political in that it was meant to demonstrate the benefits of development on the ground before the September 1974 general elections. Taylor (2003) adds that the BDP has been able to pacify urban residents through developmental programmes such as the Self Help Housing Association (SHHA) even though the government was losing millions in arrears. He contends that ‘through the loans and monthly service charges, the SHHA has supplied decent, tenant-owned accommodation for many thousands of citizens’ (Taylor, 2003:218).

Although Adrian and Barnes (1974) primarily focused on Israel and Italy, their view of dominant parties based on their performance in government is relevant to Botswana. For as long as the party performs intelligently the opposition can do little that is effective. And this has been the case in Botswana. It is quite evident that the BDP’s dominance is partly tied to the economy of the country, and the social and political stability. Such success disarmed the opposition and portrayed them as critics who had nothing new to offer.

Another legitimising factor has been the ability of the BDP to hold multiparty elections and to respect the rules of democratic competition. As much as Pempel’s conception of one-party dominance is thought to be based on European context, his conception that dominance occurs in democratic states where observance of law is upheld and free electoral competition with relatively open information systems is maintained (Pempel, 1990) makes sense in Botswana. Botswana has been credited for its long standing multiparty-ism which has earned it accolade such as the shining example of democracy in Africa and attracted donor funding for various development projects. Even when the BDP vice president was twice defeated in elections, the party accepted the results even though it devised a way of bringing him back in in a constitutional manner, through presidential appointment.

BDP dominance was further consolidated by the external financial support and local business support which gave the party financial advantage over other parties. For instance, in 1999, news papers reported that the ruling BDP party received a considerable donation of around 2.4 million Pula from an unknown external donor. This amount enabled the party to purchase vehicles for campaign (Osei-Hwedie, 2001). Additionally, the BDP has used its incumbency to benefit from the extensive press coverage. The BDP
has been able to benefit from the national radio station Radio Botswana and Botswana Television. In fact Taylor (2003) observes that Radio Botswana and the Daily News have been used as the government’s mouthpiece. This Doorenpleet (1999) refer to a as a cycle of dominance, that is, long term victory allows a dominant party better access to state resources, so increasing the opportunity for further electoral success. On the other hand, opposition parties in Botswana are not funded by the government and this limits their visibility.

Another factor that underpinned the BDP’s dominance was the electoral system. Interestingly Espring-Anderson (1990) doesn’t think that the electoral system does explain one-party dominance. However, other authors recognize the importance of the electoral system in the allocation of votes into seats. As Spieb (2002:17) argues ‘party elite share to ensure that the institutional arrangement of the polity works in the favour of the dominant party, which means that, the dominant party is in a position to play its organisational advantage and electoral dominance’. The BDP has enjoyed predominance partly because of the Westminster First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system which has been able to fragment and fracture the opposition. Through the FTPTP the BDP has won almost all the elections so far with a landslide victory, enjoying the majority seats in Parliament. The BDP polled 28 seats in 1965, 24 in 1969, 27 in 1974 and in 1994 it was 27 out of the 40 seats. However, the number of seats was not matched by the popular vote. Notably, there has been a decline in voter support in the past elections with the BDP receiving 78 percent of votes in 1974, 75 per cent in 1979, 68 per cent in 1984, 64 per cent in 1989 and 54 per cent in 1994 (Osei-Hwedie, 2001) and for other parties see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Percentage of popular vote won by party in Botswana’s general elections

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<td>BDP</td>
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<td>BPP</td>
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A different electoral system, say, the proportional representation (PR) would have produced a significant gain for the opposition parties. Rather electoral systems as institutional incentives reinforce one party dominance (Adrian and Barnes, 1974). The poor performance of the opposition party has been partly linked to the existence of the FPTP. As Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie (2006:491-2) show, whilst the combined opposition had a popular vote of 47 percent in the 2004 elections, this only translated to 13 Parliamentary seats. On the other hand, the BDP with a popular vote of 53 percent attained 44 seats out of the 57 available. Thus, the FPTP electoral system has allowed the BDP to remain dominant even with a decline in its popular vote (Molomo 2000:111; 2005:39).

Dominant parties come into existence partly because of the longevity of good governance. The BDP has ruled the country well for the past forty years with no threats to its power base and if there were any, the government was able to contain them. Possibly, this could be that the BDP has been able to contain any imminent challenges that mushroomed. Maybe Chabal (1994) has a point by observing that the success of a state’s hegemonic drive in post colonial Africa [has] depended not so much on the exercise of what appeared to be its power as a state but its ability to minimise the threat of counter hegemonic politics. Good (1992) adds that elite democracy in Botswana presupposes competition and allows for opposition, at the same time as it contains and controls them using to date effective variety of pre-capitalist and modern technologies.

In addition, the first leadership of the party is another factor explaining dominance. Seretse Khama’s position as a chief and his moderate politics permitted the BDP to exploit a rather peaceful political culture to its advantage. Although there were other charismatic leaders at the time such as Philip Matante of the BPP, their radicalism alienated them from the majority of the people who never suffered harsh colonialism, never went through a violent liberation war and liked the British protectorate officials.

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<th>Others</th>
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<td>Rejected</td>
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Besides, the BDP was and has been able to mobilise for support particularly from rural constituents who form the bulk of its support.

First, the death of the founding fathers may see the party lose its popular support. New leaders may fail to generate the same level of excitement or appeal as their predecessors. The Botswana experience however does not seem to bear this out. It seems President Masire who took over from Sir Seretse Khama was able to retain the loyalty of electorates. This could have been partly because Masire had been Seretse’s deputy and had also been instrumental in engineering the country’s development when he served as the minister of finance. Thus, the death of Sir Seretse Khama in 1980 did not erode the party’s support nor adversely affect its performance in the 1984 general elections. In fact, as table 1 show, the party won 29 out of the 34 parliamentary seats that were being contested in that year. How does one explain this success? Whilst it remains speculative, it could be that the death of the first President did not coincide with the elections. In fact, his death came a year after the 1979 general elections and 4 years before the next general elections in 1984. The fact that there were no fights over succession also helped. This allowed the successor, Sir Ketumile Masire, to consolidate and assert his position without the problem of having to fight his rivals within.

The fact that the opposition lacks organisational capacity, is fragmented (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2006:490) adds to the dominance of the BDP. The inability of opposition parties to remain united has partly been responsible for BDP’s continued dominance. In 1998 for instance, the Botswana National Front (BNF) with 13 Members of Parliament, split into two- the BNF led by Dr Kenneth Koma and the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) led by Mr Michael Dingake (former BNF vice-President) at a time when it enjoyed unprecedented domestic support. In the 1999 general elections, of the 11 Members of Parliament that had left the BNF for BCP, only 1 made it back to Parliament. The BNF on the other hand could only garner 6 seats out of the available 40 constituencies

**The BDP: A Party in Decline?**

Although the BDP appears formidable, we argue that the party is possibly in a state of decline. When taking into account its popular vote in the past and present, and
when taking into account its former coherence and unity (this will be discussed in the next section), then the thesis that it is in a state of decline may well hold. Firstly, since 1994, the BDP has witnessed a decline in its popular vote. In 1994 its popular vote stood at 55 percent, in 1999 at 54 percent and in 2004 its popular vote was 53 percent (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2006:491). This decline was against a popular vote of 80 percent in 1965, 68 percent in 1969, 77 percent in 1974, 75 percent in 1979, 68 percent in 1984 and 65 percent in 1989 respectively (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2006:491; Mpabanga 2000:53).

Given Botswana’s relative economic prosperity particularly under the BDP’s stewardship, the party’s state of decline seems to suggest that contrary to the general belief that only a failing economy leads to a decline of a dominant party, it would appear equally that a thriving economy is no guarantee of continued support from electorates. As the case with the BDP, it could well be that its decline is simply a manifestation of the need for change and not so much an embracement of opposition politics. This is because the party has been in power for 40 years, the longest period by any account.

Granted that the state of the economy is vital in the party dominance matrix, there are other equally important factors that may lead to a decline of a dominant party. Levels of literacy rates are also important in shortening the extent and length of dominance. An increase in literacy rate often means that elections are issue-driven. For issue-driven voters, higher literacy rate allows them to evaluate parties on the basis of what they commit themselves to do if elected. In Botswana, the BDP has been able to effectively exploit the largely rural constituents to its advantage, whilst the bulk of the urban elites have leaned towards the opposition. This is not to say that the opposition necessarily has better programs in place than the ruling party. Personal preferences also play a part and so too are life challenges. Pressures such as unemployment, crime levels and the cost of living are felt more in urban than in rural areas.

An upsurge of popular sentiment against the regime either because the economy is not doing well or because of high levels of corruption may also lead to a decline of a dominant party (Bratton and Van de Walle 1994: 483). Matsheka and Bothhomilwe (2000:39) agree and contend that the BDP usually performs better when the economy is doing well and poorly in times of economic depression. Apart from this, they also show
that the party’s appeal has been eroded by allegations of corruption made against its high-ranking officials. Lastly, socio-economic and political reforms, where internally or externally driven may also precipitate the decline of the dominant party. Nonetheless, some dominant parties have been able to reinvent themselves to remain a force to reckon with. We argue in the case of Botswana that the engagement of political consultants and the recruitment of Ian Khama Seretse Khama into the BDP has been an attempt by the party to re-invent itself. Nonetheless, whilst reforms offer a window of opportunity for political parties to assert themselves, opposition parties in Botswana have generally failed to take advantage of such reforms. On the other hand, the transition of the office of the Supervisor of Elections in 1997 to the Independent Electoral Commission whilst addressing opposition concerns about the impartiality and independence of the office has also entrenched the dominance of the BDP. Equally, the reduction of voting age from 21 years to 18 years has shown a high degree of political apathy that favoured the ruling party (Ntsabane 2005:220). However, internal incoherence is another factor signalling decline as the next section will show.

**Factionalism and democratisation**

This section discusses the development and entrenchment of factional politics in the BDP. Since the early 1990s the BDP started experiencing factionalism. The party has been riddled with factionalism for the last 13 years without enjoying any unity. Party leaders and factional heads have come and gone, but factionalism has persisted. The politics of the party have been dominated by two factions: the Kwelagobe/Kedikilwe and the Merafhe/Nkate factions. The first listed faction consisted of former vice president Mmusi who later died in 1994, of Kwelagobe who has been and is the standing secretary general, and of Kedikilwe who was chairman of the party until 2003. The last two were still leading the faction in 2006. On the other faction, Lt. Gen. Merafhe is the long standing minister of foreign affairs and has consistently been an additional member of the party central committee. Nkate has held various ministerial positions and has been the deputy secretary general of the party since 2003. So it is clear that the leaders of the two BDP factions are also at the centre of the party and government. Their rivalry has enormous implication for both the state and party.
However our interest here is to establish whether the factionalism has democratised the party or weakened it. Note that Khama is the son of the first president, former commander of the army and chief of the largest ethnic group in the country-Bangwato. He is very popular with the ordinary people. But the urban elite see authoritarianism in him. Khama is also the chairman of the ruling BDP (since 2003).

Botsalo Ntuane, former executive secretary of the BDP and a specially elected member of parliament (2004-2009) observed that, ‘If factionalism has reached a point where cabinet ministers and parliamentarians are distracted from their primary duties because they are attending factional meetings and plotting against each other, then such a situation requires urgent attention’ (Ntuane, 2005: 27). The point emerging from Ntuane’s contribution is that ministers in the BDP government were attending factional meetings and plotting against one another. That is, that factionalism promoted rivalry and destructive politics. But Ntuane’s perception of factionalism is negative and one-sided, failing to see its positive and democratising potentials. Positively, factionalism encourages and institutionalises divergent opinions within the party, patterns internal party debate, prevents monolithic politics and authoritarianism within the dominant party and government. For instance, after government announced strict liquor regulations that restrict trading hours from 5pm to 11 pm, Ntuane himself (partly because of his membership of the other faction) announced his intention through the media, that ‘he has already notified the Clerk of the National Assembly about his intention to table a motion to stay the implementation of the regulation’ (Botswana Guardian, 2006: front page). He did and the government postponed the implementation of the regulations. Thus, factionalism gives him and his faction the courage and institutional base to challenge the government that is run by the dominant faction of his party.

The central question here is whether there is empirical evidence linking factionalism and deepening internal democracy in the BDP. This paper demonstrates that factionalism partly failed to democratisé and marginally democratised the dominant party, the BDP. It begins by discussing the factors that accounted for the failure/success to democratisé the party. The last section is a theoretical debate on factionalism and democratization.
Factionalism’s limited democratization potentials

Our first observation is that factionalism in the BDP could not fully democratise the party because it conflicted with three central values that the party seemed to cherish. These observable values that are not publicly stated are, compromise and party unity. There is a shared understanding between both factions of the BDP that compromise is central. There is also a shared understanding that party unity is also central. However, there also exist second order values that are still contested. For instance, automatic succession of the vice president to the presidency is a new constitutional requirement which may be regarded as a second order value. While it is cherished by the dominant faction, it is opposed by the rival faction. On the other hand, internal elections and primary elections may be regarded as secondary order values as both factions are willing to set them aside to actualise the first order values.

In support of the thesis that the party has first order values, it entered into numerous compromise deals, and cancelled internal elections in order to promote party unity. However, by avoiding internal elections, democratisation was constrained as the party failed to establish which faction was electoral strong/weak for purposes of distributing political influence. One of the major deals that led to the cancellation of internal elections occurred during Masire’s presidency in 1997. ‘At the time, the party was polarised between the so-called Kwelagobe and Merafhe factions. It was alleged that the Merafhe camp threatened to boycott the elections ostensibly in protest, because the Kwelagobe camp had reneged on an earlier deal not to challenge Mogae for the chairmanship of the party’ (Molomo, 2003: 306). This was clear evidence that Mogae had close attachments with the Merafhe/Nkate faction. When Kedikilwe refused to compromise in 1997 and stood against Vice President Mogae for party chairmanship, the latter withdraw his candidacy and internal party elections were cancelled. It was during that time that President Masire initiated a compromise in which the election was set aside and leaders of the two factions agreed to share the executive positions in the party. This allowed Kedikilwe to be chairman of the party until 2003 when he finally lost to Vice President Lt. Gen. Khama.

The above deal had also allowed Kwelagobe to be secretary general until 2005 when he was unsuccessfully challenged by Margaret Nasha of the Merafhe/Nkate faction
who had refused to compromise. So, between 1997 and 2003, the party had suspended internal elections. On the one hand, compromising and agreeing to share power between the two factions promoted democratisation as it kept the factions seemingly evenly balanced in the party. On the other hand, setting aside internal elections negatively impacted on democratisation as it prevented the possibility of an alternation between the factions.

The second major compromise deal that prevented factionalism from democratising the party and that promoted automatic succession, involved the process leading to the stepping down of Ketumile Masire from the presidency of the country and of the party, and the ascendancy of Mogae, to both positions. When the presidency of the country and party was becoming vacant due to Masire’s impending retirement in 1998, factionalism heightened but no presidential elections were held as the party constitution had been amended, promoting automatic succession of the vice president. The result of the constitutional amendment was that factionalism was effectively prevented from playing a meaningful role in filling the position of presidency of the party and country. Festus Mogae, who succeeded Mmusi of the rival faction as vice president, automatically ascended to the presidency of the country and of the party without going through an election. Thus, compromises have allowed one faction to dominate the presidency, vice presidency and cabinet positions over an extended period of time, denying the rival faction from alternating in filling the same positions. Such a compromise deal assaulted internal party democracy as neither faction was allowed to prevail over the other, restricting full democratisation.

Factionalism also led to constitutional amendments, with positive and negative consequences. There were two major constitutional amendments in 1997: first, the Botswana constitution was amended to allow automatic succession of the vice president to the presidency. This was negative for democracy and prevented factionalism from playing any significant role. In addition, it was a major loss to the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction which had mistakenly assumed that Mogae would appoint Kedikilwe as his vice president, so that he could automatically succeed as president. Second, the BDP constitution was also amended to allow presidential elections even when the party was in office. This appeared at the time to be a major reform as it had the potential to
democratise the party (it may in the future). However, the democratic value of the amendment has so far failed to materialise as no BDP presidential elections were ever held since the amendment in 1997. This was primarily because of landmark political changes on the ground.

In 2001, the factions entered into another big deal when Vice President Khama was successfully persuaded by party elders not to challenge Kedikilwe for the party chairmanship. Khama reluctantly agreed to withdraw his candidature at the last minute. The terms of the covert deal was that Kedikilwe would retire from the chairmanship by 2003 so that Khama could become chairman. But when the 2003 Gantsi congress approached, Kedikilwe betrayed the terms of the previous deal and announced his readiness to defend his position. Vice President Khama also announced his intention to contest and received support from President Mogae who publicly expressed his preferences, sparking strong criticism from the rival faction who wished the president to stay/pretend neutrality.

Thus, compromise politics was put aside in 2003 and central committee elections held in Gantsi. To the lovers of party internal democracy, the entry of Khama into BDP factional politics first appeared like it would lead to a revival of internal democracy which had been compromised on many occasions. The disappointing performance of Kedikilwe against Ian Khama for the BDP chairmanship at the Gantsi Congress in 2003 destroyed his presidential ambitions. Kedikilwe embarrassingly lost the chairmanship to Ian Khama. He also lost additional membership elections and was overlooked by President Mogae in his appointment of five more additional members. Thus, after 2003, Kedikilwe had no important position in the party and government, except leadership of his faction.

More encouragingly however, as soon as Khama was BDP chairman and Mogae was not challenged for the presidency, the two declared that they no longer belonged to the Merafhe/Nkate faction. However, such abandonment of the dominant faction by the president and vice president allowed the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction to regroup and to win party primary elections, thus becoming the party candidates for the 2004 general elections. So, after the 2004 general election, it became clear that the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction dominated parliament while the Merafhe/Nkate faction
dominated the central committee of the party and cabinet. President Mogae appointed ministers primarily from Merafhe/Nkate faction members of parliament and allowed the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe to dominate the parliamentary back bench.

Such a scenario democratised the state in the sense that the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction exercised considerable influence over the parliamentary backbench and had started criticising the government and sometimes voting with the opposition. Such backbench cooperation with the opposition saw parliament approving two opposition-sponsored motions such as the one to review value added tax, the other to reform the labour law. Indeed, when the Minister of Finance read his budget speech in February 2006, value added tax had been reformed with more food stuffs, pesticides and tractors zero rated. However, two other motions had been rejected by parliament, including the abolishing of specially elected councillors that was sponsored by Kedikilwe and the abolishing of automatic succession to the presidency that was sponsored by the then leader of the opposition, Akanyang Magama. Thus, there were signs of a possible parliamentary revolt. At that point, President Mogae intervened in parliamentary processes, issued warning to Kedikilwe for putting the party into disrepute and threatened disciplinary action against him. The result is that factionalism was prevented and constrained from fully democratising parliamentary debates and voting. However, the possibility of a back bench parliamentary revolt provides checks on authoritarianism and helps to democratise state politics. A conflict between the parliamentary front bench and the back bench was a positive development for democracy.

The Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe factions’ dominance of the parliamentary back bench has had democratising elements. The ruling faction realised that it needed the rival faction in order to pass policies through parliament. In early 2005, the BDP entered into yet another compromise deal between its factions for a women’s congress at Mochudi scheduled for the 7th May 2005. Factional representatives agreed with President Mogae and Chairman Khama, to occupy positions in the women’s league without an election. ‘The philosophy behind the compromise initiative therefore is to achieve one objective: stability, which will enable the party to carry out what it was elected to do’ (Ntuane, 2005: 27). However, compromise deals serve to prevent the other faction from using parliament as a platform to sponsor policy reforms. However, while the balancing of
factions in the executive of the women’s wing promoted democracy, the cancellation of internal elections was a step backward.

There is no doubt that the party leadership sees factionalism as a big problem rather than as a democratising force. Former executive secretary (a non-elective position) of the BDP and specially elected Member of Parliament through compromise, Botsalo Ntuane, was quoted as saying ‘The architect of the compromise, party chairman Ian Khama has on different occasions expressed deep concern about the unedifying state of affairs the party finds itself in. His observation is that the party is so polarised that it runs the danger of losing focus on its core mandate which is the maintenance of good governance, and delivery on the national development agenda’ (Ntuane, 2005: 27). Ntuane, currently a member of the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction, attended compromise meetings at the residences of Ian Khama on several occasions and became the main defender of the concept of compromise. Having diagnosed the problem of the party as factionalism and fearing that the outcome of an internal election would not favour his faction, Ntuane has been supportive of the Khama-initiated compromise deal between rival factions. Ntuane rightly pointed out that internecine feuding/destructive factionalism has the effect of disabling the government. But by doing so, he failed to recognize the democratizing elements of factionalism.

Between November 2004 and May 2005 the BDP, was working on a compromise deal whose intention was to set central committee elections aside. Unfortunately, the Khama-initiated deal was double edged, and its negative consequences more serious. While such a compromise deal had the democratic potential of preserving factionalism and pluralism in state politics, it also had the authoritarian tendency of preserving automatic succession of the vice president to the presidency. However, the double-edged compromise deal collapsed as it failed to cover the Serowe 2005 BDP congress. First, the factions found it difficult to agree on how the compromise deal should look like. The Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction believed that its rival was negotiating in bad faith, giving away as little as possible or nothing. From the beginning of negotiations in November 2004, the two most senior party positions - the presidency (occupied by Mogae) and the chairmanship (occupied by Khama) were excluded from the proposed deal. Excluding the
presidency and chairmanship of the party from the compromise deal constrained the democratisation of the party.

Second, and in contrast, the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction proved to be the most undemocratic here as it proposed that the whole executive of the party should remain as it was after the Gantsi congress election. But the Merafhe/Nkate faction insisted that if the Gantsi executive was retained then only Nkate remained from their faction (after ‘losing’ Mogae and Khama both of whom were no longer ‘officially’ aligned to the faction). Part of the problem was that the ‘loss/withdrawal’ of Mogae and Khama from the Merafhe/Nkate faction was perceived to be a ‘huge gap’ which that faction believed should have been filled by a senior position. As a result, the dominant faction thought the rival faction (represented in the executive by Kwelagobe as secretary general and Dada as treasurer) would have more representation and this was unacceptable. Yet implicitly, the rival Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction rightly considered both Mogae and Khama as ‘members/leaders’ of the Merafhe/Nkate faction and did not see their ‘loss/withdrawal’ as a major loss to that faction. The real uncertainty was over whether Mogae and Khama had irreversibly relinquished their membership/leadership of the Merafhe/Nkate faction? Or whether their declared neutrality was only pretentious? In contrast, the Merafhe/Nkate faction strongly believed that it had suffered a huge loss through the withdrawal of its two most senior members and that its rival wanted to benefit more than what it was worth – retaining the control of the secretary general-ship, the treasurer-ship, gaining additional membership and asking for a cabinet reshuffle that would accommodate some of its members. Thus, negotiations between factions are not always fruitful.

Little leadership commitment to, and poor capacity of the party to deal with factionalism, aided its growth and entrenchment. There was no visible sign or evidence that the BDP leadership had enough capacity and commitment to effectively deal with factionalism. There was also no evidence/sign that either faction was doing enough to persuade or compel its members to abandon factionalism. In short, there was no emerging evidence of confidence building measures being developed either by the factions or by the party leadership to end factional politics. Instead, there was evidence in 2005 that mistrust was growing and was fuelling factionalism. For instance, the insistence that ‘Khama-initiated deal is dead’ by Kabo Morwaeng - a member of the Merafhe/Nkate
faction (Gabathuse, 26 May 2005:1) and the prompt rebuttal by Kwelagobe to the effect that ‘the deal is alive’ (Odirile 27 May 2005: 1) was a sign of growing mistrust. In addition, the counter insistence by Cabinet Minister Margaret Nasha that ‘the deal is dead’ (Mmegi 27 May 2005) and the accompanying threat by youths aligned to the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction that they were starting to campaign for him, showed the growing rivalry and competition for the control of the party. Such rivalry and competition constrain the emergence of a dominant view and encourages pluralism within the party.

There seems to be evidence suggesting that factionalism and therefore pluralism, is becoming institutionalised within the BDP. This is supported by Makgala’s thesis that the rival faction is most likely to stick around despite all the odds against it.

Although verbal abuse or being publicly told to shut up (Merafhe ordered Kwelagobe in parliament to shut up) …the barataphati/party lovers are likely to turn the other cheek instead of decamping to the opposition. Following the suspension of Kwelagobe and Peter Mmusi from their BDP central committee positions in 1993, it was suggested that they would defect to the opposition BNF in protest but that never happened. Instead, the two gentlemen stomached their humiliation and fought bitterly to regain their positions and dignity in the party. They refused point blank to heed President Masire’s plea that they drop their court case against the government. They argued that they could only withdraw the case on condition that Masire dissolved Cabinet and appointed a new one. This shows that cabinet appointments are at the heart of and soul of factional fighting in the BDP which is still the case today (Makgala, 2005: 15).

This implies two things. First, the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction is ready to stick around for some considerable time, and was ready to provide checks on the dominant faction. The institutionalisation was cemented after the Kedikilwe/Kwelagobe faction meeting at the beginning of December 2005 in Gaborone and Mahalapye and resolving ‘to take the party leadership head on’. That faction also resolved to ‘register protest over the spying of government secret police on its meetings. The Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe faction also resolved to demand power sharing at all levels in the party and government’ (Gabathuse, 7 December 2005: 1-2). Thus, the rival faction planned to confront and constrain the dominance of the ruling faction within the party.

Second, the dominant faction is hesitantly adopting factionalism as a core value. This was despite the fact that the BDP factional conflict was reaching the climax in early
2006 and that the dominant faction was about to take drastic action against its rival. The fact that the party leadership met the representatives of the factions on the 10th December 2005 signal an acceptance that factions played leading roles in BDP politics. Aiding continued institutionalisation of factionalism and pluralism, was the fact that the meeting between the party leadership and the two factions failed to adequately address the demands of the Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe faction. That is, there was no indication that Mogae would reshuffle cabinet, a central demand of the rival faction. Even though ‘the factions were given one meeting each to inform their members and disband’ (Gabathuse, 26 May 2005: 2), this has not terminated the institutionalisation of factions within the party.

**The Broader Consequences of One-Party Dominance**

One-party dominance in Botswana has had some unintended and both desirable and undesirable consequences for the quality and durability of democracy. This section evaluates the broader consequences of one-party dominance in the era of factionalism.

The continued stay in power of the BDP has given rise to good economic management rather than widespread corruption. It facilitated the implementation of development projects thus promoting economic and social stability, and by extension continuity in the implementation of economic policies. In this way, one-party dominance has facilitated economic development and political stability as the ruling party continues to enjoy relative legitimacy thus making it easier for the BDP to rule. On the other hand, one-party dominance has strengthened the executive at the expense of the legislature. According to the Secretary General of the Botswana Congress Party (BCP), Taolo Lucas, ‘one-party dominance suggests a major underdevelopment in our democratic culture, institutions and structures’ (Interview, 10 February 2006). It makes it difficult for opposition politicians to convince the electorate that there is a difference between the ruling party and the government. Such a situation makes it extremely difficult for opposition parties to sell themselves as an alternative government and this does not promote democratisation.

Another consequence of one-party dominance emerging from Botswana is that the orientation of parliament and the executive is relatively predictable. This is particularly
so as cabinet members are drawn from parliament which is dominated by one party. Thus, Gervase Maipose - the Head of the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Botswana, observes that ‘in such a situation where a significant number of the ruling party’s MPs hold executive positions while at the same time the number of opposition MPs remains small, you may not envisage a situation where government can be defeated in any policy issue’ (Interview, 6 February 2006). However, parliament is polarized between two factions of the ruling party. In addition, the executive is predominantly drawn from one faction, compelling the other faction in parliament to become hostile and confrontational. In this way, one of the consequences of dominance in an era of factionalism is that it makes parliament relatively unpredictable with a fluctuating loyalty to the executive. Such a scenario promotes democratization.

On the other hand, one-party dominance combines with a system that allows the president and his ministers to be members of parliament, to promote political stability and executive prominence. This is partly because the President chairs the ruling party’s parliamentary caucus. Nevertheless, stability and executive dominance are threatened by factionalism which brings an element of unpredictability. The president also chairs cabinet which operates under the principle of collective responsibility for administration. The chairing of both the parliamentary caucus and cabinet by the president leads to a fusion of powers between the executive and the legislature. In any case, cabinet ministers attend both sessions, and this constrains democratisation in the sense that parliamentary structures do not meet in the absence of ministers.

This shows a concentration of power in the executive. As a result of the powers vested in the executive, especially the president and ministers, parliament in Botswana is constrained to exert its authority. Osei-Hwedie and Sebudubudu (2004:13) categorically advance a number of explanations why this is the case. They write:

First, the president appoints his cabinet without approval from parliament. Second, he also appoints four specially elected MPs who have the same voting power as those elected by the people. Third, although the president can be removed by a parliamentary vote of no confidence, such a vote would result in the dissolution of parliament and a new election, which makes in unlikely that parliament would take such a step. Fourth, the president occupies a very strong leadership position in the ruling party, which has dominated parliament since independence. The large
number of BDP MPs guarantees support for the executive. Fifth, the notion of collective responsibility does not allow ministers to criticise or oppose the government, since by doing so they would be opposing their own (party) policies. Sixth, the president enjoys the support of a well-qualified, well-organised, confident bureaucracy. Lastly, it is the civil service, and not parliament, that is the main policy-making institution in Botswana.

But it should be noted that the president is restricted to appoint his ministers only from parliament. Where he appoints cabinet members from outside parliament then such a person has to become a member of parliament either by standing for an election or by presidential appointment to parliament. In the light of this, the electorates endorse the appointment of ministers through an initial election into parliament. As Maipose puts it, ‘one-party dominance reinforces the tendency for patronage politics’ (Interview, 6 February 2006). Maipose also thinks that one party dominance cripple the emergence of critical debate on the internal management of party affairs, thus constraining the whole idea of internal party debate. Nonetheless, the situation in Botswana is to some extent different as there is vigorous internal party debate as demonstrated in the previous section.

In a situation where the executive wields so much power and the ruling party controls the majority of seats in parliament (the main accountability structure in a democracy) one-party dominance may lead to overconfidence by the ruling party as it is guaranteed of a win in policy matters (although factionalism makes it difficult to have total control). In that way, only factionalism acts as a check on authoritarianism of the dominant party. The divisions (factions) within the ruling party pose the real possibility for a back-bench rebellion and therefore a serious check on the executive.

Thus, while one-party dominance compromises the very tenets that undermine a democracy, factionalism revives them. The alleged tension in South Africa under the African National Congress (ANC) (Southall, 2005:66) between party dominance and democracy is checked by factionalism in Botswana. Southall recognizes the dangers to accountability posed by a party which can dominate parliament and which has the power to change (or under-mine) the constitution. He also recognizes the dangers posed by a party which has power to erode the independence of other institutions. Furthermore, Southall recognizes the dangers of a party which can wield its financial powers to
establish networks of patronage at [all] government levels. On the last point, it should be noted that Botswana is different in the sense that there is very little patronage.

**Opposition weakness and one-party dominance**

One-party dominance also suggests that the political opposition is weak. Selolwane (2002:68) blames the opposition for failing to offer the electorate ‘a meaningful alternative to the ruling Botswana Democratic Party’. Although she concedes that resources are a factor in explaining one-party dominance in Botswana, she ‘argues that the opposition parties made a number of strategic errors which rendered them electorally unattractive before they could establish their legitimacy as contenders for government power’, thus facilitating one-party dominance (2002:68). Selolwane also notes that the splits that occurred within the main opposition have also contributed to its poor electoral performance over the years.

The BCP secretary general reiterates that one-party dominance ‘deprives the nation of alternative ideologies that may facilitate the economic and democratic development process’ (Interview, 10 February 2006). In this way, one-party dominance negatively impacts on the institutionalization and consolidation of democracy. This is particularly important as the functioning of a democracy is also measured by the alternation or change of government. Maipose adds that ‘it is difficult to say for sure that democracy in countries with such systems of government is fully institutionalized because the change in government still remains speculative’ (Interview, 6 February 2006). In addition, Osei-Hwedie (2001:57) notes that ‘a multiparty system is one of the defining elements of a democracy. It provides a competitive dimension during elections and gives the electorate a choice of party programmes and candidates’. In the case of Botswana that choice and competition is limited by the existence of a disorganized opposition.

The continuous hold onto power by the BDP has not only sparked tensions/factional struggles within the opposition parties it has also sparked tensions with its own ranks as well. However, there is no doubt that the opposition has suffered the most from internal wrangles. The main opposition, the Botswana National Front (BNF), has so far experienced splits prior to every election, negatively affecting its electoral
The split in the opposition seems to be associated with the frustration of staying out of power for too long. But the splits also occurred due to poor governance. Osei-Hwedie and Sebudubudu (2004:45) observe that a split in the opposition ‘not only frustrates the voters in general, but even those who have traditionally supported the opposition end up perceiving it as neither trustworthy nor credible. Therefore, the task is to change the negative public perception of the opposition to one inspiring confidence and trust. This in turn means a change of attitude on the part of all members of the opposition’. For Selolwane (2002:68), ‘to break the monopoly of power that the ruling party has so far enjoyed, Botswana’s opposition must transform itself into a meaningful competitor and government-in-waiting’. Such transformation could convince the electorate that the opposition is indeed a government in-waiting. For the opposition to be perceived as such, it has to take serious stock of itself even if this means disbanding and merging into one political party, a distant option in the light of the realities on the ground.

Conclusion

The article has considered various issues associated with the BDP as a dominant party. It has discussed the reasons for BDP dominance, showing that some were generalisable (such as effective incumbency), and others unique to Botswana (such as the history of peaceful politics). Moderate politics, chiefly authority of the first president, coherence of the succession process, the vibrancy of the economy and equitable distribution of resources, as well as the electoral process, all combined in favour of BDP dominance. However, the article also showed that the assessment of dominance through the number of seats won and through the popular vote gave conflicting results. Limiting ourselves to the number of seats won, the BDP appears clearly dominant. In contrast, limiting ourselves to the popular vote shows the BDP in decline.

The article has also shown that the BDP has been declining in terms of popular vote and of cohesion within the governmental system. On the other hand, factionalism has shattered the coherence of the party, entrenched internal debates, institutionalised pluralism, and provided checks on authoritarianism. However, the article has also demonstrated that the BDP was on a revival course. In addition, the non-active participation of the president and vice president in factional politics has played the role of
levelling the playing field, and thus promoted free and fair internal competition. On the one hand, the free and fair competition for positions has not been practically extended to the presidency that is also accompanied by automatic succession of the vice president.

The article has also noted the wide consequences of one-party dominance in Botswana. It observed a growing economy over a long period of time, the fusion of the executive and parliament and that only factionalism liberated the latter to some extent. The article also observed that the poor performance of the opposition parties played a crucial role in the existence of the one-party dominance. However, the article also noted that one-party dominance contribute to the factionalism and splits in the opposition as well as factionalism in the ranks of the dominant party itself.

At the theoretical level, a dominant party cannot collapse if its factions learn and appreciates the importance of compromising so that dominance does not sow the seeds for its own destruction. But factionalism could only complete its democratisation role if it leads to alternation within the dominant party and in the government, roles which it fails to play in Botswana.

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