

Protracted Social Conflict or Interest-Based Conflict: The Basis for Successful Liberal Politics in Botswana

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Abstract

Electoral violence is dependent upon specific kinds of social conflicts - deep rooted conflicts. It is absent or minimal in societies characterised by interest-based conflict. The article below uses Botswana as a case study of societies whose social conflict is interest based and therefore able to enjoy peaceful elections.

Introduction

A new book entitled '*When Elephants Fight*' (2010), analyses political instability, electoral violence and coalition governments in Africa. It argues that managing electoral violence in societies characterised by 'protracted conflict', or by 'deep-rooted conflict', where the issues are not negotiable and where there is political intolerance and serious violation of human rights and protracted conflicts between political parties, is a big challenge that has seen the emergence of coalition governments in Africa. From Cote D'Ivoire to Kenya to Malawi, to Senegal to Nigeria, to Uganda to Zimbabwe, ruling parties initially banned opposition parties, and later rigged or mismanaged elections or incited violence in order to win or to enter into coalition governments.

My contribution is a case study on Botswana that has enjoyed political stability and electoral success. Botswana has now held 10 general elections, all of them free, peaceful, credible and legitimate. My argument is that Botswana did not suffer from deep-seated social conflict that characterise most of the societies that experience electoral violence. Rather, Botswana is characterised by 'interest-based competition', and therefore enjoys a

high degree of dialogue and tolerance between the ruling and opposing elites and manages its elections well.

Literature review

In *When Elephants Fight*, Gilbert Khadiagala (2010:17) asks whether the key puzzle, ‘...is whether this is caused by profound divisions inherent in Africa’s politics and socio-economic systems or whether it signals the transitional teething problems of building better electoral management systems and impartial judiciaries to interpret and adjudicate electoral disputes’. In a case study on Nigeria, Samuel Egwu (2010: 92) observes that ‘The scale and intensity of violence during the 2003 and the 2007 elections gives credence to fears that democratisation in Nigeria remains fragile and may not necessarily deliver sustained political stability’. After the 2011 presidential elections, violence occurred in northern Nigeria.

Others such as Mwesiga Baregu (2010) and Mpho Molomo (2010) pin their hopes on constitutional reforms, and electoral reforms, respectively. But electoral violence occurred in Lesotho even after constitutional reforms had been effected. What is missing, are case studies or comparative studies of African societies where electoral violence has not been a feature of the politics, and where democratisation and political stability, have been sustainable by a single political party. Such studies could provide indicators as to what is present in their politics which is missing in countries that experience electoral violence.

My approach borrows from Edward Azar (1990), John Burton (1990) and Gavin Bradshaw (2010), who focused on the classification of social conflicts. To begin with, Edward Azar (1990) identified ‘protracted social conflicts’ characterised by (i) a multi-communal context (ethnic diversity); (ii) frustrated human needs; (iii) skewed governmental delivery along communal lines; and (iv) the internationalisation of aspects of the conflict.

John Burton (1990)'s parallel research identified 'deep-rooted social conflict', where 'social conflicts characterised by the presence of frustrated human needs, which, because they are, in a sense, hard-wired into the human psyche, cannot simply be negotiated away' (Bradshaw, 2010: 71). In such situations, Bradshaw adds that, 'should parties negotiate away their needs satisfactions they will invariably break the terms of their agreements before long and hostilities are likely to resume'. What this suggests is that the deep-rooted social conflict between the Tswana based Botswana Government and the CKGR San is most likely to resume even after the law courts ruled in the latter's favour.

Gavin Bradshaw (2010) distinguishes between 'interest-based conflict (competition, which may be resolved by means such as negotiation), and value-based conflict, which is more deep-seated and not really a good subject for negotiation, with its concomitant compromises'. In this regard, Botswana's inter-party politics is characterised by interest-based conflict that allows political parties to easily accept defeat in one election and continue to participate in future elections.

The Botswana Case Study

The dispute between the predominantly Botswana Government that is Tswana-dominated, and San (Bushmen) of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), seems to fit the definition of protracted social conflicts or deep-rooted social conflicts, which are not easy to solve through conventional means such as negotiations. In this conflict, the Botswana Government forcibly relocated San communities from the CKGR and as a way of preventing their return, destroyed the only source of water they had depended upon inside the park that was established for them by the colonial government in the early 1960s. The Botswana Court of Appeal (2011: paragraph 7) observed that

It is common cause that during the [relocations] which followed, a pump engine and water tank, which had been installed for purposes of using the borehole at Mothomelo were dismantled and removed. It is not far-fetched to conclude as a matter of overwhelming probability that this was designed to induce the residents to relocate by making it as difficult as possible for them to continue residing inside the

CKGR. Be that as it may, the borehole itself remained in place. It has indeed turned into a white elephant whilst the [Basarwa] communities in the area continue to suffer on a daily basis from lack of water

The San communities that were forcibly relocated, later returned and the Botswana Government refused to allow them to re-connect the borehole. The point here is that a conflict of this nature precludes the existence of liberal politics because the issues involved cannot be resolved by conventional methods.

In terms of deep-seated conflict, Botswana was lucky in the sense that the San constituted a small population and did not constitute the largest opposition party in the country. Botswana was also relatively lucky in that the CKGR conflict took a legal rather than a political dimension that could have triggered violence. By implication, peaceful electoral democracy is an almost impossibility where protracted social conflicts predominate. So, while the deep-rooted (or value-based) conflict between the government and the San has dominated the headlines in the recent past, it constitutes a tiny element of the country's politics that is predominantly interest-based because the bulk of its opposition parties consist of Tswana peoples who share the same core values as those in government.

Botswana's ruling and opposition leaders come from the dominant Tswana ethnic groups that see each other as cousins, or what Schapera (1937) calls the Tswana cluster of the Sotho group of bantu-speaking peoples. Schapera notes that, '... the Kwenā, Ngwaketse, and Ngwato are commonly held to be the offshoots of what was originally one tribe, whose senior branch is represented by the Hurutshe; while the Tawana are known to have separated from the Ngwato at the end of the eighteenth century'. But as pointed out elsewhere (Maundeni, 2010) in the case of Lesotho, this could not have prevented the emergence of deep-rooted tensions which incited political violence. However, Botswana was different in the sense that (unlike Lesotho) it did not have a long history of rebellious chiefs embedded in a gun culture that bred political violence. Rather, Botswana had inclusive politics in which poorly armed chiefs invited the establishment of a protectorate

over their land and in which their conflicts with the Protectorate State took legal dimensions.

Botswana is characterised by high levels of tolerance between the opposition and ruling elites. Firstly, defections are common in Botswana politics and there is dense movement of defectors between the main parties. For instance, in 2006, both the then sitting mayor, and a former deputy mayor of Lobatse Town Council, defected from the BNF to the BDP which staged a celebratory welcoming party for them. All that the BNF did was to organise a peaceful mass protest which the police allowed to take place and the matter ended there. In contrast, the BDP immediately initiated a vote of no confidence on the sitting deputy mayor who was still a member of the BNF. This resulted in the BDP taking both positions from the BNF.

In an unusual case of extreme tolerance, a youth leader Kabo Morwaeng defected from the ruling BDP and joined the BNF in 1994. In 2002, he returned to the BDP where he stayed until 2010 when he defected to form the Botswana Movement for Democracy. His defection was typical of politics in Botswana. Ray Molomo and Daniel Kwele, first president and first vice president of the BNF respectively, resigned from that party, joined the BDP and went on to become government ministers. Molomo rose through government ranks to become minister of education and finally Speaker of Parliament.

In contrast, Kwele became an assistant minister in the BDP government, but quit to form his own party (Maundeni, 1998). In other cases, a former minister Willie Seboni resigned from the BDP government and joined the BNF without any inhibitions. And, Otladisa Koosaletse and Mokweetsi Kgosipula, defected from the BNF to become president and secretary general of the Botswana Congress Party (BCP), respectively. Both defected to the BNF in early 2007 and contested that party's primary elections in 2008 without any restrictions.

In late 2007, numerous leaders of the Botswana Peoples Party (BPP) crippled that party by defecting to the BCP, BDP and BNF, respectively. This did not cause any violence

and violation of human rights. Thus, Botswana's politics of defection in the background of peaceful politics has promoted the free movement of leaders, activists and members from one party to the other. This indicates that the different political parties look for political support among the same people and accommodate defectors whose freedom is respected and who find changing parties an attractive option. However, it must be noted that defections favoured the ruling party most of the time.

Second, there is mutual avoidance in Botswana's politics and parties rarely disrupt each other's rallies. For instance, there were few instances in 2004 in which the ruling party and one of the opposition parties scheduled their political rallies for the same venue and time in Old Naledi. This instance that had the potential to steer intolerance and violent clashes, was resolved amicably. The ruling BDP gave in and postponed its rally. This suggests that the ruling party should exercise a high degree of tolerance to promote mutual respect with opposition parties. More importantly, there have been few instances in which parties scheduled political rallies on the same day and venue. This implies good management of political rallies.

In another regard, members of political parties attend only rallies of their own parties and avoid those of the other parties (DRP, 2004). It should be noted that attendance of political rallies is generally poor as there is high apathy in the population (IEC, 2002; Maundeni and Balule, 2005). This partly means that the population is less politicised and this reduces political tension and promotes tolerance. However, this aspect of Botswana politics was disrupted by the formation of the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD) - a splinter from the ruling BDP. After the split, the nation experienced what was termed star rallies, in which both parties transported their supporters to rallies organised in different parts of the country. However, defections, mutual respect and avoidance between political parties and political apathy of the population characterise the politics of toleration and peaceful co-existence in Botswana.

Parliamentary and council seats are won and lost without resorting to violent confrontations. This is partly because the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has

gained trust from the major players, has asserted its independence from the presidency with much success and has conducted credible elections whose outcomes are accepted by all. Headed by a sitting judge of the High Court as chairman and assisted by academics and private lawyers as members of the commission, the IEC has emerged as a credible institution charged with running elections. Thus, the integrity of the IEC has been a central component promoting public trust, acceptance of election outcomes and respect for human rights. The worrying thing is that the Office of the President wants to impose controls over it and Justice Mosojane – its former chairman, allegedly resigned in protest (Mmegi Newspaper, 18 January 2008).

Currently, any suspected rigging or irregularity in the conduct of elections is handled by the High Court where a legal binding ruling is made. This is a high court that ruled against a sitting vice president of Botswana (Peter Mmusi in 1984) and called for a bye-election which he subsequently lost to the leader of the opposition BNF (Maundeni, 2005). It is a high court that ruled against the government in 2006 in a case in which the San indigenous people challenged their relocation from the CKGR and in 2011 in a case in which the San challenged the government's refusal to allow them to connect a borehole for domestic purposes. Thus, the integrity of the courts is an important ingredient in promoting public trust, political toleration and respect for human rights. Aggrieved candidates and parties willingly take their complaints to the high court with the full confidence that the matter would be handled fairly and objectively. However, Tshosa (2008) notes that legal costs are extremely high, impeding access and denying justice to those with poor financial services but who want to challenge electoral irregularities. More importantly, the government must respect the ruling of the judiciary if human rights are to be observed.

Factional rivalries have not been ethnicised and remain localised within the parties. It should be noted that factional rivalries are a common phenomenon in most of the political parties (BDP, BNF, and BPP). Importantly, the BDP and BPP have learnt to live with factionalism in a peaceful manner. As Makgala correctly observes about the BDP,

Although verbal abuse or being publicly told to shut up (Lt Gen. Merafhe of the dominant faction told Daniel Kwelagobe of the rival faction in parliament to shut up)... 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 (Makgala, 2005: 15).

They were later elected back into their former positions in 1993.

The ruling party tolerated its Members of Parliament who sometimes cooperated with their opposition counterparts to successfully pass motions, sometimes against the wishes of the governing party. The rival Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe faction of the BDP had considerable members in parliament, and sometimes voted with the opposition. Such cooperation and voting with the opposition saw parliament approving a few opposition-sponsored motions such as the one to review value added tax in 2006, the other to reform the labour law. The Kedikilwe-Kwelagobe faction also sponsored its own motions and got support from opposition MPs. The BDP leadership have had to exert enormous pressure, compelling the revolting faction to tone down. The point is that inter-party cooperation was possible in the Botswana parliament, pressurising the state to be responsive to concerns of the rival faction and to the opposition parties in parliament. Factional rivalry within the ruling party makes a back bench revolt likely, making the political leadership uncertain of its own position and to succumb to pressure.

There are also forums that have been established to promote interaction between politicians from different parties. These include the defunct All-Party Conference (APC), a statutory body consisting of political leaders of all the political parties, with the power to screen applications for commissioners of the IEC. The APC meets when called by the minister responsible, allowing its abuse and reducing its effectiveness in addressing pre-election conflicts. There is also the 'All Party Parliamentary Caucus' consisting of all members of parliament from the different political parties. Furthermore, there is the

‘Caucus for Women in Politics’ consisting of women and other political activists from different political parties. These parliamentary and non-parliamentary associations enhance inter party cooperation by increasing contact between ruling and opposition political activists and by enabling them to cooperate on some things which concern all of them.

Inoperable coalitions

Coalition, or power-sharing, has been tried all over Africa in order to end electoral violence and to manage deep-seated conflict. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, coalition governments were negotiated and established in 2008 as a way of minimising deep-seated conflicts. Commenting on the power-sharing in Zimbabwe, Bradshaw (2010) observes the presence of organised anarchy (whereby ZANU PF persecute members of the rival party), the existence of heavy government, gridlock in unlocking the engines of economic development and citizen dissatisfaction. Shale (2010) adds that power-sharing arrangements serve the interests of the political elite and marginalise the voting public. Matlosa (2009: pp3-21) observes the Zimbabwean power-sharing in the following terms:

Its very composition excluded the electorate who voted in the elections, as well as civil society organisations, whose voices were severely curtailed. This is an important point because it suggests that instead of empowering the people, post-election negotiated elite pacts tend to disempower them, empowering the political elites. The popular votes of the Zimbabwean people have been set aside and the political whims and caprices of the political elite have loomed larger. The dialogue agenda remained secret; the dialogue venue remained secret outside the borders of Zimbabwe and the deal on the new government remained secret until the public pomp and ceremony that marked the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

Coalition politics, has threatened democracy by being secretive, elite oriented and by marginalising the voting public.

In contrast, half the Botswana population prefers a coalition of opposition parties (DRP, 2004). The DRP investigated the popularity of an electoral pact between the BNF, BPP and BAM. The questionnaire asked the electorate to indicate whether they thought the pact was a good idea and whether it would help those parties to win elections.

Recently the Botswana National Front (BNF), the Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM) and the Botswana People's Party (BPP) entered into an election pact for the 2004 general elections. In this pact, these opposition parties will be fielding a single candidate in a given constituency.			
	Yes	No	Don't know
1. Do you think that the electoral pact is a good idea?	46.0	38.8	15.3
2. Do you think it will help the parties to win the elections?	41.7	37.9	20.4

Source: DRP, Opinion Poll 2004

While the picture was inconclusive, 46% said the pact was a good idea and 38.8 said it was not, and 15.3% did not know. In addition, 41.7% thought the pact would help the member parties win the elections, 37.9% said it would not and 20.4% did not know. These results show that almost half of the respondents, including those who did not sympathise with the pact party members, thought the pact was a good idea. But slightly more than half (54.1%) either thinks it is not a good idea or do not know.

But opposition coalitions have failed to materialise in Botswana. For instance, in October 1991, three opposition parties (the BNF, BPP, and the Botswana Progressive Union-BPU) came together under the umbrella body called the People's Progressive Front (PPF). The main objective of the PPF was to contest the 1994 elections as a single entity to avoid vote splitting, whereby opposition parties compete against each other. However,

the umbrella PPF collapsed before the 1994 general election. This is a sign that cooperation of parties in Botswana is a temporary measure that is not meant to last long. However, the point is that opposition parties are free to form coalitions and they are also free to disengage.

Party splits and coalitions commonly accompany each other in Botswana opposition politics. In his book, Michael Dingake is convinced that the then BNF leader (Kenneth Koma) engineered a split whose potential damage he thought could be handled through a merger with other opposition parties. He quotes Koma, to the effect that:

Following problems which have arisen in the Botswana National Front, and the fact that some members of Parliament representing the wishes of the middle class in Botswana society have constituted themselves into a Parliamentary Caucus which seemingly wants to establish the hegemony of a middle class, we believe you have no doubt become aware that class differentiation in Botswana have reached a stage where it is no longer possible for the different classes to work effectively in a mass political organization (Dingake,2004:115).

Immediately after the 1998 split, the BNF initiated talks with the Botswana Labour Party (BLP), USP, BWF, BPP, IFP, BPU, and Bosele. In January 1999, an umbrella body Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM) was launched, after which the cooperating parties issued the following communiqué which failed to bring permanent cooperation:

We the opposition parties of Botswana have after sober and deep reflection on the current political situation in Botswana resolved to co-operate in order to take over political power and transform our society for the better....The arrogance and intolerance and insensitivity of the ruling party and its manifest unwillingness and / or inability to seriously address the socio-economic problems which beset our society such as mass poverty and unemployment necessitate an urgent change of government of this country (*Mmegi*, 29 January-4 February 1999).

It later proved that they had not been all sober enough to create a permanent agency. Some BNF elite opposed the alliance until the party unceremoniously pulled out from it. The subsequent leader of the BNF (2001-2010), Otsweletse Moupo, was opposed to that alliance and his view was that the BNF had not been ready to cooperate with other

parties. In an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper in January 2000, he claimed that an internally incoherent BNF erred by initiating the BAM alliance. He observed that:

As a general principle of alliance politics, an alliance can only be fruitful when the various parties to it have unity of purpose. I doubt if BAM partners shared the same views. Another fundamental aspect is that gains made by individual parties should not be sacrificed. That was not the case with BAM as the other partners said since the BNF had experienced a split, it was no longer a force to reckon with, and therefore they all had to start from scratch. For an alliance to work, the leading organisation must be organised enough to be able to handle problems inherent in alliance politics. Having just emerged from the worst split in its history, the BNF wasn't prepared for that. To the contrary, the BAM adventure disorganised us further (*Guardian*, 21 January 2000).

From the above statement, a coalition needs coherence within the largest partner in order to sustain it. Thus, the BNF was not in a state to lead such a coalition. The umbrella body collapsed as soon as it was launched. The other partners proceeded with the alliance, contested the 1999 elections, and performed very badly. The BAM alliance ended up being another alliance of small parties.

In 2000, the BAM alliance invited the BCP for discussions intended to explore opposition unity. The invitation letter proposed that:

The relationship may be in the form of a loose federation in which we cooperate in joint projects; an alliance where each party retains its identity under one administrative umbrella; or a complete merger in which all parties disband or re-emerge as an entirely new party (*Midweek Sun*, 19 January 2000).

However, BCP was not ready for any of that before the 1999 election; partly because it mistakenly thought it would perform outstandingly. At its Francistown convention in 2000, the BCP resolved that the time was not right for opposition cooperation. In contrast, Paul Rantao, a member of the BCP executive committee who had lost in the 1999 general election differed with the dominant party leadership, unsuccessfully called for opposition unity and resigned from the party and rejoined the BNF where he was later elected to parliament in 2004. Similarly, Isaac Mabiletsa another member of the BCP

executive also differed with the party leadership by calling for opposition unity, resigned from the party, re-joined the BNF where he too was elected to parliament in 2004.

Notwithstanding BCP's 2000 anti-coalition congress resolution, it made official contacts with the BAM alliance to explore cooperation. At a joint seminar at Mahalapye in June 2001, BCP and BAM met under the theme to 'exchange views on the need and timeliness for unity among opposition parties in general and between the BCP and BAM in particular.' Not surprisingly, the seminar failed to produce tangible results as it met strong resistance from within the BCP ranks. However, in 2007, BCP and BAM were able to form an alliance in readiness for the 2009 general election. They later merged.

Inter-party democracy between the small opposition parties

Political parties in Botswana have freedom to explore different models of cooperation. Their desire to talk to each other helped to improve inter-party relations. For instance, smaller opposition parties such as Botswana Independence Party (BIP) and the Botswana Freedom Party (BFP) withdrew from the BNF – initiated talks in 1999 before the umbrella body was formed because they preferred a merger rather than a loose cooperation. Motsamai Mpho, leader of the BIP clearly expressed this movement in the following terms.

The BIP withdrew from the talks because our idea of unity was to form one political party. Unfortunately the other parties merely wanted an umbrella organisation to be formed. The BIP withdrew because we did not believe that the proposed strategy could bring about a new democratic order in Botswana. We felt that we should be united in principle, word and deed. The unity talks were a futile attempt to unify disparate positions for the sole purpose of defeating the BDP, but doing so would not bring about the kind of policies the nation needs in the long term. We remain committed to structural change in the political system. The BIP did not want a marriage of convenience (Edge, 1996:162).

In pursuit of the politics of merger, the BFP and the BIP merged into the Independence Freedom Party (IFP) in April 1992. The merger lasted until the IFP went into the BAM alliance which later joined the BCP.

However, other smaller parties such as the Social Democratic Party (SDP and Botswana Workers Party BWP) came together with the smaller MELS in 1994 to form the United Democratic Front (UDF), a loose coalition which failed to make any impact and collapsed. There is no doubt that the UDF drew inspiration from other, similar regional organisations such as the UDF in South Africa formed in the late 1980s and which offered an effective opposition to the apartheid regime, and from UDF in Malawi, which in May 1994 effectively ended the thirty year autocratic rule of Hastings Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP). However, a united front of the smallest opposition parties in Botswana could not play the same role as in the region. It soon collapsed.

The BNF-led Opposition Pact for the 2004 General Elections

The BNF entered into an electoral pact with BAM, BPP in preparation for the 2004 election. The then BNF publicity secretary, the late Mareledi Giddie, said that as a result of being encouraged by the Kenya experience, the BNF would pursue, with increased vigour, its well known objective of mobilising all patriotic and democratic forces into a dynamic fighting machine ready to take over government from the ruling BDP in 2004 (*Mmegi*, 10-16 January 2003). Giddie's sentiments were given a strong backing by another senior member of the party, Paul Rantao who said the Kenyan achievement was possible in Botswana and all that was needed was a coalition purely based on collective will and built on opposition action (*Mmegi* 10-16 January 2003). BNF party president, Otsweletse Moupo, stated that he had commissioned an internal discussion paper on uniting with other opposition political parties (*Guardian*, 17 January 2003).

For his part, Lepetu Setshwaelo of the BAM alliance, who had always advocated opposition unity, then said local opposition parties did not need an environment like the recent one in Kenya in every detail. He stated that what Botswana must learn from Kenya

was that an old established ruling party could be dethroned as was the case with KANU (*Mmegi*, 7-13 February 2003). It was in the context of the above sentiments that the momentum for opposition unity was unleashed in early 2003. However, the process began in an atmosphere of mistrust, especially as a consequence of what transpired in the run-up to the 1999 elections between the BNF and other parties. Talks began in earnest between the BNF, BPP and BAM, after failure to bring on board the BCP and the New Democratic Front (NDF (another break-away from BNF), and other smaller groupings.

A generous election pact was agreed by the cooperating parties on 13 September 2003 in Francistown. They agreed not to oppose each other in elections, to allow the party with the strongest following in a particular area to field a candidate who should be supported by the other signatories, and to request the other parties to the pact to select suitable candidates in constituencies where the allocated party does not have one (*Mmegi Monitor*, 15-21 September 2003). The small BPP was generously allocated six constituencies (Tati East, Tati West, Francistown East, Francistown West, Tonota North and Bobirwa) to field candidates. BAM was allocated eight constituencies, (Maun East, Maun West, Chobe, Ngami, Okavango, Nata / Gweta, Nkange and Francistown South). The BNF was allocated the rest, (except South East South or Ramotswa that was allocated to BAM president who stood under a BNF ticket. The pact venture got off to a shaky start as some, especially within the BPP, questioned the criteria for the allocation of constituencies, and urged the party leadership to withdraw from the pact. The BPP leadership insisted that staying in the pact was in the best interest of the party. At the same time, pact leaders travelled throughout the country holding joint political rallies to explain the alliance.

Separately, the BDP and BCP criticised the pact as a political project waiting to fail. The then Vice President and BDP chairman, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, mocked the alliance, saying that Pact stood for “Politicians Are Confusing Themselves,” and that they were a motley crew of ineffective political entities (*Monitor*, 7 June 2004). In addition, BDP’s Secretary General Daniel Kwelagobe described the pact as “the three blind mice” (*Mirror*, 14-20 July 2004). Similarly, the BCP referred to the pact as “a hastily concocted

marriage of convenience” (*Mmegi*, 21 April 2004). The then BCP Publicity Secretary Dumelang Saleshando dismissed it, saying: “The pact is not necessarily a winning formula. It is aimed at scoring political points against us, not solidifying the opposition” (*Guardian*, 25 June 2004). The BCP vowed to go it alone in the 2004 general elections and suffered the consequences by winning only 1 parliamentary seat, in comparison to BNF’s 12 and BAM’s zero. Thus, opposition unity has not been successful in Botswana, both in terms of working together and in terms of votes. But parties have a choice to try different models without being restricted by the electoral model.

The BNF entered into an election pact with the BAM alliance, BPP and BCP over by-elections after the 2004 general election. The parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), specifying that only one party should field a candidate in parliamentary bye elections and in council by-elections, and that the parties would assist each other in campaigns. The parties also promised to explore more cooperation in preparation of the 2009 election. The MoU for bye-elections was followed with relative ease, helping Otswelitse Moupo (BNF leader) to capture a parliamentary seat in a bye-election in 2005.

In 2006, the BNF, BCP, BPP and BAM started negotiating a comprehensive pact in preparation for the 2009 general election. But before actual negotiations could start two important things happened: members of the BCP and the BNF started criticising each other in the media, and offered contradictory analyses of the value of the negotiations; the negotiating teams had drafted a ‘Peoples Unity Charter’ whose signing was abruptly postponed because the BNF was not happy with its wording and not ready to sign. BCP defectors (Rantao, Mabileitse and Kgospulato) started criticising that party, sparking off heated exchanges over the local media. Mokweetsi Kgospula unleashed verbal attacks on the BCP. When the heated exchanges were dying out and the planned signing of the ‘Peoples Unity Charter’ was near, an influential member of the BNF central committee, Dr Monageng Mogalakwe, published a long article questioning what he labeled ‘the misplaced’ focus on negotiations between the opposition and propounding a re-focus on electoral reforms.

To me it is rather unfortunate that some people have unfairly blamed the opposition parties for the so called vote splitting, without ever raising any questions about the fairness or lack of it of the FPTP system, or indeed the 2000 All Party Conference resolution. In my view, the challenge facing the opposition parties and indeed the Committee for Strengthening of Democracy is Botswana's current electoral system, and not the so called vote splitting, which is merely an outcome of the discredited FPTP system (Mogalakwe, Mmegi 5 March 2006: 5).

His article showed that some BNF central committee members were opposed to the negotiations and did not see its value towards strengthening the opposition. It also showed that the BNF was divided on the issue. A further implication is that other opposition parties and commentators linked Mogalakwe's article with the postponement of the signing of the Peoples Unity Charter, and concluded that the BNF had no interest in the negotiations and was trying to opt out. The deputy editor of the Sunday Standard had already started making such insinuations.

Mogalakwe's article attracted a lengthy response from the former president of BCP, Michael Dingake, who questioned its timing that coincided with the aborted signing of the 'People Unity Charter', and he dismissed its core argument that negotiations between the opposition was mutually exclusive of campaigning for electoral reforms. Dingake's view was that focusing primarily on electoral reforms was misguided because observable signs indicated that the ruling BDP would not agree to them.

Let us be honest about the opposition capacity to successfully stage pressure that can induce instant positive reaction from the BDP. In the eyes of the BDP, the 'first past the post' (FPTP) electoral system is their best line for staying in power. They see it as their rearguard fortress, not to be surrendered lightly (Dingake, Mmegi 12 March 2006: 9).

The point he was making is that success in inducing electoral reforms is partly dependent on the capacity of the opposition to exert pressure, and partly on the BDP agreeing, making it a difficult route in the short term. The other point was that the opposition had no capacity to compel the BDP to institute electoral reforms, and this was not quite right

because other reforms had been instituted due to pressure from the opposition and civil society.

In contrast, Dingake preferred negotiations between opposition parties because this enjoyed public support and because it could be done by the opposition parties themselves. 'The public likes to see the opposition talking, to prove they share their concern of avoidable splintering' (Dingake, Mmegi 12 March 2006: 9). He was partly right. It should be noted that though the negotiation process was conducted by the opposition themselves and enjoyed public support, it was opposed by some elements within the parties, making it protracted and uncertain as well. Thus, neither pressing for electoral reforms nor negotiations between the opposition was easy and called for the opposition parties to strategise.

Dingake's other point was that pressing for electoral reforms and negotiating a pact between the opposition parties could go together.

Opposition parties' negotiations in contrast to electoral reform, is a tactic for electoral victory for immediate results, not a constitutional design for a political life plan to guide future political set up. The two processes should not be mixed up. They are separate and equally valid in their respective spheres. They can be pursued simultaneously for good results and for reinforcement of the democratic process which they both view as an ideal of paramount importance (Dingake, Mmegi 12 March 2006: 9).

However, pursuing two difficult activities at the same time may not have been a good strategy. Sequencing them could have maximised the gains and could have avoided divided attention. But the question of which one comes before the other would have to be settled first. The question was resolved politically when the BNF left the negotiations and the BCP clinched an alliance with BAM and NDF.

Conclusion

The absence of deep-seated political tensions in the mainstream politics allowed Botswana to institutionalise inter party democracy, build trust and respect between the major players, and usher liberal politics. Botswana's political elite share a common history and culture, and tolerate one another and have avoided resorting to violence. Currently, there are numerous formal institutions which create frequent interaction between the political parties, thus contributing to tolerant politics. In addition, the credibility of the IEC and the electoral process, and of the courts of law that handle electoral disputes, contributed to the proper management of elections, to political trust and to mutual respect between the political parties and the observance of human rights. Even factionalism within parties and defections between them, have not pushed political parties to resort to violence and violation of human rights.

In contrast, attempts by opposition parties to institutionalise their own cooperation through coalition arrangements, has been problematic, with visible and costly failures. However, attempts to institutionalise opposition cooperation continue. Ironically and sadly for Botswana, successful coalitions elsewhere followed electoral violence. All known cases of recent coalition governments, were preceded by electoral violence. Thus peaceful Botswana seems precluded from the enjoyment of coalition governments.

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