

Editorial preface

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Towards the close of the second millennium, most Southern African countries transformed themselves from dictatorial and one party regimes into democratic multi-party governments. These changes were heralded by the return to multi-party politics in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia and the hosting of multi-party elections in Mozambique. Moreover, the end of white minority rule in South Africa, and an end to South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia marked the end of racial strife in the region. Whereas the civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola are still rife, there is a lot of optimism that peace and democracy are at hand.

Botswana has been, perhaps more than any country in the region, a frontrunner in democratic politics, as the oldest surviving democracy in Africa. It has had eight uninterrupted regular council and parliamentary elections. Yet despite this laudable record, the structures and institutions that should institutionalise and consolidate democracy remain weak and ineffective. Dialogue among researchers, political and civil society actors is essential to create a favourable national environment in which democracy can flourish. This special issue, the *Transition into the New Millennium* provides a forum for the dissemination of research findings on Botswana's democratic process with a view to fortifying democratic governance.

The study of the electoral process during the 1999 election was conducted under the auspices of the Democracy Research Project, which is a non-partisan, multidisciplinary research group at the University of Botswana. The aims and objectives of the project are:

- to research Botswana's political life and institutions;
- to support Botswana academics in their research on Botswana's democratic processes and institutions
- to support local politicians and political parties in their efforts to learn more about comparative political processes such as elections and political parties;
- to facilitate dialogue between different political parties, groups and members of the public on various issues pertaining to development and sustenance of democracy;
- to facilitate regional networks between groups bent on nurturing democracy; and
- to disseminate and publish research findings.

In pursuance of these objectives, this special issue discusses the challenges presented by democracy and governance in Botswana, especially with respect to the 1999 election. The first article is by Mokopakgosi and Molomo, and it provides context for understanding political discourse in Botswana by discussing the interface between government and opposition parties. They highlight the weaknesses of opposition parties and their failure to coalesce into a united opposition. Opposition parties have failed to emerge as credible democratic alternatives to the rule of the Botswana Democratic Party. Mokopakgosi and Molomo characterise Botswana as a two party system dominated by one political party.

Lekorwe discusses how democracy can be enhanced at the local level. He discusses the relationship between central government and district, town and city councils, and argues for the decentralisation of authority. One of the most salient features of democratic politics is effective and participatory politics at grassroots level.

Matsheka and Bothomilwe evaluate the relationship between economic conditions and election outcomes in Botswana. Botswana's political stability and success is tied to the

favourable economic climate in the country. With increased rates of urbanisation and higher levels of education, voters are increasingly issue-oriented when casting their votes.

Voter apathy represents the weakest link in democratic discourse, and in an attempt to find its causes, Mpabanga analyses trends and patterns of voting by party for the past eight general elections. The article also offers a comparison of electoral trends in select SADC and industrialised countries. Mpabanga attributes the declining voter participation to low levels of voter education.

Mokomane disaggregates voters according to their demographic features. She examines the relationship between party preference and selects demographic characteristics such as age, sex, place of residence, and educational background. The article demonstrates that there is a close correlation between age, sex and party preference.

Chieftainship has been a factor in determining electoral outcomes and it is extremely relevant to assess it has mediated democratic struggles in the post-colonial period. Using case studies of the Central, Kgatleng and Ngwaketse Districts, Barei traces the decline on the role of chieftainship in election outcomes. Chieftainship has consolidated electoral outcomes in Central District and Ngwaketse, while Kgatleng has negated this thesis.

Somolekae discusses how the frontiers of democracy have been widened through women's NGOs. She discusses the role played in particular by Emang Basadi. She concludes that, while the representation of women in Parliament and other senior positions in government is necessary, such representation does not *ipso facto* mean effective representation of women from all segments of society. The representation of women needs to be matched by concrete actions that will result in transformation of institutions and power relations in the whole society.

Ntsabane and Ntau point to the patriarchal structure of Tswana society as one of the factors that tend to undermine youth participation in politics. Youth suffers from being perceived as the leadership of tomorrow, but not of today.

The executive powers that the President enjoys have been a subject of academic and political debate in recent years. Molomo highlights areas where the President has exercised his executive powers such as a state of emergency and the granting of a sabbatical leave to the Vice-President Ian Khama Seretse Khama. He concludes that the President must be directly elected by the electorate to ensure greater accountability.

A further article by Molomo shows how electoral systems are susceptible to manipulation and also determine the rules of how leaders are elected into public office. He discusses the pros and cons of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP), Semi-Proportional and Proportional Representation (PR) electoral systems. Molomo argues that the FPTP system that Botswana has used since independence promotes an effective link between a Member of Parliament and his or her constituency. Yet this system is weak in terms of enhancing popular participation in the political process, and tends to exclude marginal groups from mainstream politics. The PR system stands out as the most democratic electoral system but it also has some inherent weaknesses. It is said to lead to a proliferation of political parties as well as being amenable to coalition governments, which are inherently unstable. As a result, Molomo concludes the Mixed-Member Proportionality and or Parallel electoral system would be best suited for Botswana.

Finally, Molefe and Mguni discuss public opinion polls and demonstrate their relevance and reliability. Despite being relatively new in Botswana, as a statistical tool they have forecast elections with great precision. Political parties have come to recognise their validity and importance in predicting electoral outcomes.

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Open Society Foundation of Southern Africa without which this study would not have been possible. We dedicate this special issue to all those who wish to nurture and consolidate democracy in Botswana.